

HOW THEY DID

LIFE STORIES

VOLUME
4

CHARLES B. COCHRAN

By

JAMES CLEUGH.

CHARLES BLAKE COCHRAN

Charles Blake Cochran

Lord Bountiful

by

JAMES CLEUGH

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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE 'NINETIES	7
II. THE NEW CENTURY	34
III. WAR AND POST-WAR	64
IV. THE 'TWENTIES	82
V. THE THIRTIES	109

grand scale, the scorn of pettifoggers, the proud discontent with anything but the very best, even perhaps, deep down, a hint of the passionate mysticism that makes William Blake a prophet-king among poets and painters, round off the pictured cluster of profitable angels at the humble cot on the edge of Lindfield Common

This imaginary conversation piece bears very little relation to the play of that name by Mr. Noel Coward which Charles Cochran was to produce long afterwards. The cradle-scene is no doubt entirely fanciful in one sense, for heredity and environment are notorious deceivers and in any case require a special type of fertile ground for their operations. There may have been a hundred other boys with grand old surnames born in Sussex in the year 1872. But they did not become Cochrans. Many, doubtless, belied their ancestors and their surroundings during their subsequent careers. Many might just as well have been called Smith and born in Camden Town, for all the later affiliations they showed with blood and soil. In most it would be impossible or fatuous to trace the fairy godmothers. Yet in Charles Cochran's case there is some excuse for this not strictly scientific procedure.

For the qualities suggested certainly existed at a very early age in the subject of this brief account of a singularly magnetic personality and life. Mr. Cochran has himself told us in two books¹ how he was

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, 1925, and *I Had Almost Forgotten*, 1932

drawn, in the late eighteen-seventies, before he was ten years old, to the travelling fairs that frequented the village where he was born. So are most urchins. But not many of them conceive a ruling passion from contemplating the crude if picturesque jugglers and acrobats of a tented field that contains, however, to the square yard, more generosity and joviality, more sheer hard and ill-requited work, pluck and devotion to no matter how humble ideals of art, than the most impressive camp of literal warriors. That this urchin did so testifies to his precocious possession of all the virtues of the best type of showman.

The showmen and performers of the caravans considered themselves artists. Cochran imbibed their views. And contact with many of the acknowledged greatest of the artists of the modern world has not caused him to change his opinions on this subject. He believes that any process, that provides or maintains in being any new experience which brings pleasure to the majority of the people that have access to it, deserves the name of art. On this definition, as he writes in *I Had Almost Forgotten*, "funambulists unquestionably rank with the leading lights of the dramatic stage." The equation of jugglers, clowns, negro dancers and singers and Marie Lloyd with Lucien Guitry, Ellen Terry, Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt may shock the æsthete and the intellectual snob. Yet the proposition is extraordinarily difficult to disprove by simple logic. Metaphysics have to be called in to

damn it. And metaphysics is a subject hard to agree upon.

Cochran, it will be seen, is no abstract philosopher. If he had been one we should have been the poorer by the great illumination of fun and beauty that he has given us from the bounty of his artistic genius. So much is certain. And we may therefore be content not to quarrel with his sturdy championship of the humbler purveyors of entertainment.

The village green of Lindfield is less than fifteen miles by rail from the theatres and what were then the music-halls of Brighton. And at that salubrious resort, so fortunate throughout its history in the vigour of its stage life, and so popular among people to whom the theatre is important that its very name has for long been a catchword on the boards all over the country, young Charlie Cochran, at the age of seven, saw his first pantomime in the old Theatre Royal, with the great comedian Arthur Roberts as 'Tinbad the Tailor,' one of the chief cronies of the nautical hero. A framed programme of this performance still hangs in the luxurious office of the veteran impresario in Old Bond Street and is well worth reading for its quaint phraseology and boisterous wit. Programmes were cheap at their prices in those days.

The effect of this experience, as was only to be expected in view of the exceptional genius of Roberts and the exceptional susceptibility of this particular small spectator, proved electric. Charlie decided at

once to become a comedian of the first water. He did not relinquish this ambition until he was young Mr. Cochran ' and well on into his twenties. It was characteristic of him, however, that he did not return to the rustic fairgrounds with any diminished respect after this first plunge, soon followed by many others, into the still almost Dickensian world of theatrical life at Brighton.

It was in Brighton, too, at the Grammar School to which the boy was sent in due course, that he encountered the second of the personalities that were destined to influence conclusively the outset of his career. It is typical of the versatility of the embryo showman that this second personality differed in all but originality of talent from the first. Charles Cochran found himself sharing a study with a thin, delicate-looking, red-haired lad of exactly his own age, afflicted with a slight stoop, very un-English in general appearance, a headlong talker and a wild gesticulator. This boy's name was Aubrey Vincent Beardsley.

The thick-set, rubicund, round-faced adolescent from Lindfield and the slender, sallow, sharp-featured and sharp-tongued young æsthete became fast friends. For they each intended to do great things when they grew up and to do great things that no one else could do. Their chief common bond, apart from ambition, was the theatre. They spent practically the whole of such hours as could be spared from the home circle and the drudgery of the

schoolroom in attending the professional stage, figuring on the amateur one and discussing both from every possible angle. It was a period at which 'school theatricals' were exceedingly popular. Cochran and Beardsley were prominent in every performance that took place during term-time and they organised similar productions among their friends in the holidays. They soon grew learnedly familiar with 'props,' 'business' and every particle of theatrical technique that they could pick up. Neither doubted for a moment that there could be more than one profession in which their far-reaching ambitions could possibly be achieved.

Authority, however, and especially provincial authority, still looked askance, even in the late 'eighties, upon the stage as a career for well-educated young men. Both Cochran and Beardsley, at the age of sixteen, were apprenticed to professions more reputable in the eyes of their seniors. The former joined a Brighton surveyor, the latter a London architect. Both eventually broke away; Beardsley to win almost immediate recognition, if also a considerable degree of notoriety, as a daring iconoclast in draughtsmanship, and to defy sensationally many other conventions than those of plastic art, Cochran to experience long years of hardship and uncertainty before attaining a similar apotheosis.

Charles had a voice and an ear which owed more to youthful robustness, sensitivity and enthusiasm than to any very striking natural aptitude. He sang

a good deal at smoking concerts, a typical institution of the age, before he left the surveyor. It was the next best thing, in his view, to joining a theatrical company, the longed-for step from which he was, for the moment, firmly debarred by his family and their advisers. The standard demanded at these local functions was not high. The Sussex societies and clubs which he entertained were as glad to hear young Mr Cochran, in their moods of after-dinner expansiveness, as they were to applaud most other youthful amateurs. The songs were generally comic. the jolly, postprandial audience beamed heartily over cigarettes, pipes and cigars, clapped and guffawed, and held no post-mortems. The uncriticised singer achieved a certain modest reputation and was encouraged to seek a broader field. After much toilsome manœuvring he managed to obtain a professional engagement at Dover.

Those who pay to be entertained and those who pay the entertainers, also naturally pay a good deal of close attention to the entertainment. The atmosphere here was much more alert than at less formal gatherings. After young Mr. Cochran's first song the concert manager courteously but firmly intimated that his services would no longer be required that evening or on any other evening. This happened in August, 1890, when Charles Cochran was eighteen.

The disappointment was acute and had several important consequences. Among these, however,

was not included that of abandoning a stage career. The stubborn courage and tenacity which were to be evidenced again and again in Cochran during the years that lay ahead now for the first time showed their nature decisively. He did not dream of giving up his most deeply rooted ambition, to make a name as a comedian, simply because he had been rather unexpectedly rebuffed on his first professional appearance. This metaphorical tap on the nose merely showed him that the thing was going to be a little more difficult than he had imagined. And Cochran was never afraid of difficulties. On the contrary, they have always attracted him.

He behaved on this small and early occasion, as on so many great and later ones, rather like a general whose scouts have been driven in, than like a disqualified competitor. The move he made was characteristically bold and spectacular. The boards were closed to him as a singer? Then he would get on to them in some other capacity. Straightlaced and fastidious England rejected him? There were other countries where people understood English

From what he could learn in conversation with travellers and from what he read he gathered that better chances existed for theatrical aspirants across the Atlantic. For in the United States a less sophisticated culture, a more even distribution of wealth and a more generous and reckless temper in the inhabitants promised opportunities to the right man

which could almost be described as golden if one were young enough Cochran was young and he was certain that, in one line or another, he was the right man. Events proved, in the end, as so often later, that this last conviction was well founded. Want a thing badly enough and you'll get it, runs the popular aphorism But you must want it with the 'single-purposed mind' which Horace, that thorough man of the world, admired so much Cochran cherished none of the distractions which usually prevent young men from attaining to their hearts' desires.

By December, in conspiracy with another youth of his own age, one Scotson Clarke, who had talents both for acting and for painting, he had saved up enough money to buy steerage passage to New York. The two adolescent knights-errant took French leave from their respective jobs and families, endured the disagreeable but highly educative experience of an ocean voyage cheek by jowl with emigrants of the most primitive type, and landed in the metropolis of the United States, just before Christmas, with less than five pounds sterling between them.

New York in the 'nineties was a sprawling, untidy but eminently picturesque city: very different from its neat, economically planned and skyscraping successor of to-day. There were not many high buildings, though more than in any European town. Mule-drawn tramcars rattled along briskly between rows of smallish and rather dirty-looking shops.

Many of the houses in the residential quarters were still rickety wooden structures bearing the impermanent aspect associated with early colonial settlements. Fruit-stalls stood at every corner, piled with huge green melons and little black grapes. Pig-tailed Chinamen and coal-black negroes, together with every type of mixture between these and the European races, abounded in the crowded streets. Comparatively few women were to be seen. Half the male population, it white, went about 'heeled' with conspicuous six-shooters and wore tremendous hats. Spidery-looking four-wheeled 'buggies' and two-wheeled racing 'sulkies,' drawn by leggy thoroughbreds, shot about like lightning through and round irregular squares of incongruously countrified appearance. Finally, there was the Bowery, which young Mr. Cochran was to come to know very well indeed in the next few years. Few Englishmen found their way there. The life of the inhabitants of this district—named from the Dutch word for a 'peasant'—was almost as lawless as in the Wild West.

As the two newly arrived emigrants had anticipated, it was easier to get a job in New York, at that time, than it was in London at the same date. For Americans, they found, were much more friendly and communicative, much more helpful and willing to give strangers a 'break,' than English people. Food and lodging were cheap and easily procurable, as well as respectively more

appetising and more comfortable than they would have been in London at the same prices. After two or three false starts both Cochran and Scotson Clarke found themselves 'on the road' in touring companies, the latter with a comic opera, the former first in the famous farce *Our Boys* and then in the enormously popular adaption for the stage of Jules Verne's sensational novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*, in which Cochran first played at Niblo's Garden Theatre in New York.

His principal difficulty, he discovered, was less with the acting itself—to which he took like a duck to water, though never reaching more than averagely competent level—than with his appearance. He was constantly being taken for even younger than he was. This made it harder for him than for Clarke to get engagements and to keep them after he had got them. Even to-day, at sixty-six, he looks barely forty-five. At twenty he must have looked barely fourteen.

The living was a precarious one. Companies were frequently left stranded and starving by absconding or dishonest or inefficient or merely unlucky managers. On one occasion young Mr Cochran found himself pacing the pavements of Chicago with nothing in the world but twenty-five cents and the clothes he stood up in. Racking an extremely resourceful brain and a memory quickened by despair, he recollected that he had met in Lindfield, as a boy, an American gentleman named Booth and that this personage was said afterwards to have

gone to Chicago. He looked up the name in a telephone directory which was not then so full of Booths, or any other names, as it became a few years later, found his man and called at Mr Booth's office.

His reception was of the coolest. Mr Booth condescended to remember Lindfield and little Charlie Cochran, after some coaxing, but appeared distinctly anxious to get rid of the penniless young actor who now stood before him. He was unable, he told his visitor, to see his way to offer him any kind of employment. But he melted, in the end, to the extent of a charitable donation of five dollars and a firm intimation that no further assistance was to be looked for from him or his. Mr Booth was not a typical American of the 'nineties. But doubtless he was right on general business principles and given the prejudices of his time and class against members of the theatrical profession. For all he knew, young Cochran might have been a terrible waster. Still, the anecdote leaves Mr. Booth in rather less than a favourable light.

All the same those gratefully accepted five dollars—it is typical of Cochran's sterling common sense and utter absence of that vanity which so often masquerades as proper pride, that he did accept them without the slightest hesitation—saved the derelict young Thespian from starvation for a short period. A further engagement came just in the nick of time. But it was not long before he was again in

Chicago, after once more 'stranding,' this time really 'down and out.' It was the date of the World's Fair of 1892; a wild episode in the city's history. Chicago was crammed with strange and often desperate characters. Gambling hells abounded. Cochran met a fellow-actor named Price, one of the old school but in the same situation as himself, an impressive-looking figure with a leonine white mane and of towering stature. Price's total fortune consisted of one dollar, with which, in Cochran's company, he visited a back-street 'dive' where roulette was played in a strident, smoke-filled atmosphere resonant with oaths, laughter and occasional revolver shots.

In a few minutes Price, with the most astonishing recklessness, had won no less than eight hundred and seventy-five dollars, a feat which would seem quite incredible if it were not solemnly vouched for by C.B.C. himself.¹ Much more comprehensible is the sequel, in which, after a gargantuan banquet and some hours of luxurious repose, the two momentary favourites of fortune returned to the scene of their triumph and there lost, by the same headlong tactics as before, the entire sum that remained in Price's pockets.

This disaster was not so utterly fatal as it might have been if the World's Fair had not happened to be growing to the height of its commercial success

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, p. 23.

in Chicago just then. Young Mr Cochran betook himself to the exhibition, exploited every ounce of his actor's veve and charm and soon found himself selling fountain-pens at one of the humbler stalls that lined the avenues of the fairground. Customers were exuberant and optimistic. The new salesman was a born expert at his job. He soon made enough at it to get back to New York, where by this time, he knew all the ropes that could hoist him into yet another 'part' in a travelling theatrical company.

Tour succeeded tour, with varying fortunes. But after nearly three years in America, Cochran still remained very far indeed from within hailing distance of Arthur Roberts. He seemed to himself to have made no progress at all beyond digging himself in as an extremely lowly member of 'the' profession. He was, indeed, an actor of considerable experience for his still comparatively tender years. But, at the very best, he could hardly be described as more than a just tolerably competent actor. Critics in the Press were occasionally kind to him. But a disquieting number of them spoke out nearly as bluntly as the writer of a notice printed in a newspaper published in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, anent the farce *A Breezy Time*: this more forcible than elegant animadversion read as follows:

'Charles B. Cochran played the part of Smart, the detective. He certainly must have learned

the art of acting in a stable with hungry horses. He did nothing but attempt to chew the paint from the scenery. A more ridiculous chump has never been seen on the local stage.'

'Clippings' were not often as 'cutting' as this. But it was a rude age, especially away from the big towns. And though minor actors affected to scorn the clumsy carpings of ill-natured and uneducated rustics they nevertheless smarted under the primitive lash more than they need have done. Cochran was young and sensitive and ambitious. He grew depressed and began to think of returning to England.

But the turning-point in his career was at hand at the very moment when it looked very much as though he were about to sink, whether in America or in England, into the populous and dingy morass of 'might-have-beens,' in which the stage contingent, serving perhaps the most exacting of all mistresses, is always so disproportionately large. A third personality, no less remarkable than the first two, arose from the hurly-burly of New York theatrical life in the mid-'nineties, like a god from a very noisy and ramshackle machine, to act as somewhat temperamental guide, philosopher and friend to the indifferent actor with the tremendous slumbering gifts for superb showmanship.

Richard Mansfield, the Irving of New York, was at this period rising fast to the height of his fame

He had followed up a great popular hit as Baron Chevrial in *A Parisian Romance*, produced in 1883, with a profoundly subtle and impressive rendering, four years later, of the doubled title-roles in R. L. Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The next year he played at the Lyceum Theatre in London by special invitation of Sir Henry Irving himself and in 1889 he produced *Richard III* in New York. By the time Cochran first met Mansfield the latter had also been seen as Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man*, one of the earliest of Shaw's plays to be shown in America, for the great actor was nothing if not up to date and 'intellectual.'

His personal character, like Irving's, was extremely positive and dictatorial. There was Prussian blood in him on the mother's side and his clean-shaven countenance, adorned by severe *pince-nez*, might have passed for that of a staff officer under Moltke. He had, too, business ability of a high order allied to his mastery of his art and was a first-rate advertiser and publicity man for his day. To these principal strains he added a grimly whimsical humour and a capricious temper that made all his subordinates and most of his acquaintances mingle their admiration for his genius with a 'holy terror' of his speech and actions off the stage.

One day, while Charles Cochran was 'resting' and feeling more than usually gloomy about his prospects as a second Arthur Roberts a certain

eccentric and picturesque old actor named Mervyn Dallas said to him :

" You ought to call on my friend Dick Mansfield and see if he can give you anything to do. Say I sent you, my boy, say I sent you."

Cochran thought it over. He was sceptical of tangible results. He knew Dallas to be a somewhat hollow if sonorous reed and Mansfield to be an extremely formidable personage as well as the best actor in America. But his position was at the time desperate and his courage has never been anything but indomitable. Taking it in both hands and harnessing his 'nerves' firmly to his will he marched into the box-office of Mansfield's theatre and asked for the 'boss'. The box-office keeper replied with an uninterested and pre-occupied "No!" to three successive questions as to Mansfield's whereabouts and the possibility of an interview. But at the third "No!" a voice of thunder came from the room behind the office.

"Who's that asking for me? Why did you say I wasn't here?"

The box-office keeper's bored demeanour changed in a twinkling. Cochran was at once ushered into the presence. The great man was gracious, allowed his youthful visitor to talk freely. From that moment the issue was never in doubt, as it never was in after years when C.B.C. found himself able to exercise his Irish charm and tact upon anyone whom he wished for any reason to 'blarney.'

"Well, young man," said the magnate at last, with a grim twitch of his iron lips, "I'll give you an engagement. Come to me when my season opens."

A glow of triumph and gratitude enveloped the swelling breast of the youthful visitor. So definite a promise was far more than he had dared to hope. It would be a tremendous step forward in his career to join Mansfield's own company. He felt as though his fortune were made as he thanked his benefactor, but did not forget to add, as he was taking his leave

"I ought to mention that it was Mr. Mervyn Dallas who sent me to see you."

The fierce wit that had been in abeyance throughout the brief interview flashed out

"Did he? Well, I'll overlook it on condition that *you* promise not to send *him* to see me."

Cochran walked back to his boarding-house on air. But a few weeks later he was thrown into consternation by the news that Richard Mansfield had fallen seriously ill. It was rumoured that he was dying. He recovered, however, in time to start the rehearsals for his forthcoming play. Charles Cochran wrote to remind him of his promise. But no answer came. Once more the young actor fell from the extreme heights of exultation to the extreme depths of despair. Then he received a verbal message from Mansfield's theatre. He learned that the following dialogue had taken place at a recent rehearsal.

Mansfield: "Where is that young Englishman I engaged?"

Stage Manager : " I've no idea, sir."

Mansfield. " If you don't find him you can consider yourself discharged "

Cochran hastened to present himself He was engaged to play the part of a bargee in a free adaption for the stage of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, called for this purpose *Rodion the Student*

A period of close association followed in which Cochran got to know his fastidious and eccentric chief a good deal better than most of the men and women who worked in the Mansfield companies. These rarely got beyond a general reaction of nervous dread But C.B.C.'s 'nerves' have never given him much trouble. He was far too interested in recognising a kindred if elder statesman of the theatrical world and in admiring his consummate art, to fear the personal idiosyncrasies of the man himself Cochran was destined to learn from Mansfield more than any other single individual, except perhaps Reinhardt, has taught him. Meanwhile he studied his new employer with extreme relish and stored up in his memory all he could hear of him.

One of these stories, illustrating at once the meticulous nature of the man and his subtlety in finding out what he wanted to know about his staff, may be quoted here On one occasion he sent for his business manager, who was tactless enough to refer in the ensuing conversation, to ' the show.'

Mansfield : " THE SHOW ! How dreadful ! "

Manager : " The performance, I meant "

Mansfield : " Oh, worse and worse ! Horses perform Dogs perform. The theatre is not a circus. You mean, I suppose, the PLAY ? "

The manager hastened to acquiesce. Mansfield then asked him if he would like a whisky and soda. The manager thanked him but declined, remarking that he had just had some beer.

Mansfield : " What is BEER ? How dreadful ! Thank you, that will do for this morning. "

He hated people to drink in the daytime and wished to discover whether his business manager was addicted to this ' vice. '

A day came when he sent, too, for Charles Cochran. The company was on tour in Pittsburg and the interview took place in Mansfield's private railway-coach. The great actor had a horror of hotels and public travel.

Mansfield : " Do you think, Cochran, you will ever be a good actor ? "

Cochran : " I believe I'm improving. I do my best. "

Mansfield : " Do you think you'll ever be as good an actor as I am ? "

Cochran : " No. But I hope to make something of it. "

Mansfield : " One doesn't come into the world merely to make a bread-and-butter living. "

Cochran : " No "

Mansfield: "Well, I've been watching you. I don't think you'll ever be a great actor. But you do your work as the stage manager's assistant very well indeed. How would you like to be my private secretary?"

It is not necessary to say that this unexpected and almost intoxicating offer was instantly accepted. From this moment Cochran was fairly launched in his true vocation of showmanship. Mansfield, with the miraculous *flair* of a man of genius for a spiritual son of at least one side of that genius, had long perceived that his young Englishman, only barely proficient as an actor, possessed wings which were capable of taking him to undreamed-of heights, if only behind, not on, 'the scenes.' That Cochran proved himself the best private secretary and personal representative an important actor ever had was merely the first step on a road which he was to travel farther than any other man had yet reached. Mansfield could not have anticipated just how far. He was a busy man and egotistic in the grand manner. But he would scarcely have picked so obscure a member of one of his many companies if he had not been sure of faculties that already rivalled his own off the stage.

This ideal private secretary soon began to meet, for the first time in his life, some prominent people. He encountered, in the way of business and also socially, Israel Zangwill, Beerbohm Tree, Gerald du Maurier, Arthur Bourchier. Some of these meetings

later paved the way for interesting contacts and contracts in England. For the moment he sometimes needed all his exceptional tact to get on with a good many of these magnates. But courtesy and conciliation were in his Sussex blood. He was soon much more popular with such public figures than his principal ever cared to be. The training of these years was to prove invaluable to the budding impresario as time went on.

But Mansfield's temper was notoriously short and his Prussianism increased with the years, fundamentally kind as his true nature always remained. The inevitable first serious quarrel between chief and secretary broke out at Cleveland, Ohio, in the middle of the decade, after nearly three years of close association.

Cochran threw up his post and returned alone to New York. There he came to know E. J. Henley, the brilliant but hard-drinking actor-brother of the famous English poet. With E. J. Henley, Cochran started a school of acting, devoting himself entirely to the commercial side of the institution, while the novelist, James Huneker supported Henley on the artistic. The enterprise was only moderately successful, chiefly owing to the Bohemian habits of the principal promoter. These were not without their effect upon the rest of the staff. Cochran, still in his twenties, with his Irish blood and his deep-rooted love of the exotic and the bizarre, would have been more than human if he had played the Puritan

in this boisterous *milieu*. But he is at bottom the coolest of customers. The wild scenes in which he occasionally took part at this date did not prevent him from living, as he has always lived and always will live, as a pattern, essentially, of the strictest moral correctitude.

A significant landmark in his career is to be placed in 1895, during the period of his closest association with the E. J. Henley group. It was in this year that he first appeared in the rôle of full-fledged theatrical producer. The play was Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* and the place New York itself. It was an impressive start, worthier than most productions of still better things to come. The experienced if erratic E. J. Henley partnered Cochran as co-producer and the venture proved tolerably successful from the financial point of view. But it was not followed up, for reasons which can be guessed from the respective characters of the two promoters.

Cochran was well aware that his present situation was not altogether satisfactory. It was nothing like so promising as that which had immediately preceded it and it was leading nowhere that he particularly wanted to go. But he did not for the moment see quite what else he was to do. By 1897, he had made up his mind definitely to return to England. And though an amusing episode occurred this year which practically reconciled him with Mansfield he did not take advantage of it to alter his decision.

In October, 1897, Richard Mansfield produced *The Devil's Disciple* in New York. On the first night of the production Cochran, an hour or two prior to the time the performance was scheduled to start, was drinking cocktails with E. J. Henley and a number of the latter's equally thirsty friends. C.B.C. himself writes¹ that he must have 'gone into double figures,' for when he arrived at the theatre he was refused admittance as 'tight' by Joe Dillon, the Irish acting-manager. Cochran had set his heart on seeing the 'show,' as Mansfield would certainly not have called it. When Dillon caught him by the arm he 'let fly at him.' The subsequent fisticuffs were described by the *Morning Telegraph*, next day, in the parlance of the prize-ring. The writer affirmed that "Cochran has missed his vocation, for he would certainly have been a shining ornament of the roped arena." The five minutes' battle ended in the removal of C.B.C. to the nearest police court for a few hours, until the delighted Mansfield sent down to bail him out. The future successful promoter of many famous boxing matches thus proved himself by no means a novice at the practical side of the game.

By the end of 1897, Cochran had had enough, for the time being, of America. He had not exactly wasted his time there. He had discovered that he would never be another Arthur Roberts. He had learnt a great deal about the world of the stage, through all its hierarchies, and he had shown that he

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, p. 60.

could deal with it pretty smartly on the business side. His years in intimate relation with Mansfield had been a more than liberal education in this respect. But yet he did not feel that he could now renew those years, though the way almost certainly lay open. He itched for independence, he was perhaps a little homesick and in any case he was anxious to break new ground.

Scotson Clarke, with whom he now again for-gathered, was in a similar mood. Some seven years after the two friends had first crossed the Atlantic together they made the return journey, in almost equally unpretentious circumstances, to wit, on a tramp steamer captained by a Presbyterian Scot with strict views on Sabbath-keeping. For on finding Charles Cochran reading *Martin Chuzzlewit* on deck one fine Sunday afternoon, this zealous commander swooped down upon him with a cry of "Wud ye bring down the wrath of God on the vessel?" and threw the offending masterpiece overboard.

In spite of this challenge to Providence the ship berthed safely in the Thames, greeted, characteristically, by a ripe specimen of 'London particular'. Cochran called on Mabel Beardsley, the sister of his old friend Aubrey, whose sadly early death had occurred at Mentone but a short time before. Miss Beardsley was herself on the stage and knew many interesting people. At her house the returned exile met Max Beerbohm, the inimitable essayist, Robert

Ross, the friend and future biographer of Oscar Wilde, whose ghost still lived in the cafés of Boulogne, to die two years later, as well as the painters William Rothenstein, William Nicholson, Charles Ricketts and Walter Sickert, and many writers connected with the exotic Yellow Book series.

Acting engagements were to be had. But they were not very remunerative. Cochran preferred journalism. For some time, sponsored by his new literary friends, he wrote regular articles for various ephemeral publications, gaining a facility with his pen which was to stand him in excellent stead in later years, not only in composing his two books of reminiscences, but also when unconventional points of view had to be made clear in conversation and on paper to stubborn conservatives of the world of entertainment.

These last years of the eighteen-nineties were largely spent by Cochran in the society of the brilliant groups of artists and writers, æsthetes and eclectics, who flourished at that period. He made friends with such men as Ernest Dowson, the unhappy debauchee but exquisite poet, Charles Conder, the personally flamboyant painter with the delicately charming touch, Toulouse Lautrec, James Pryde, then a poster artist, and Gordon Craig, son of Ellen Terry, at that time known chiefly for his woodcuts. He thus obtained a far more liberal education in culture than would have been possible



CHARLES B. COCHRAN CHATTING WITH SOME OF HIS "YOUNG LADIES" DURING A REHEARSAL

if he had remained exclusively in his own world of the theatre or moved in any less specialised circles

And yet he was Charles B Cochran, theatrical producer, a born artist in his own medium, certainly, but without exceptional talents for the writing or the painting which his most admired friends at this date exercised. It looked as though the road he was following might lose itself, for the second time, in a highly decorative and amusing but blind alley.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW CENTURY

BUT the tide of Cochran's affairs took a new turn as the old century ebbed away. Like a good many other smart young Englishmen of the day he was in the habit of occasionally 'running over' to Paris for a few days. On one of these excursions he saw a performance of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a play which had taken the French capital by storm in December, 1897, and was still drawing crowded houses. The romantic brilliance, the extravagant eccentricity of this piece captivated Cochran as he had never been captivated by any stage drama in his life before, for he was by temperament peculiarly suited to appreciate its exoticism. He determined that it must be made available to English-speaking audiences. There was one first-rate English-speaking actor whom he knew well and who could play the part better than anyone else he could think of.

Cochran cabled to Richard Mansfield. A few weeks later the American Irving was in Paris, then in London, when he told Cochran that he intended to rival Coquelin in the title-rôle of *Cyrano* in New

York He invited his old secretary to resume his former post. Completely reconciled, the two men recrossed the Atlantic—this time Charles Cochran travelled in comparative splendour—and set about the new production.

The English version triumphed in New York as the original play had triumphed in Paris. Mansfield was held by responsible critics who had seen Coquelin to be at least his equal as *Cyrano*. A tour of the States with this drama followed, during which the re-established secretary was introduced to further celebrities, including Sir Henry Irving himself, Mrs. Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt. Sir Henry, by the way, once boasted, in Cochran's presence, that he had bought a play from every dramatic critic in America—to ensure that their notices of his own work would be at least respectful!

A grotesque incident, typically American in its bizarre mixture of absurdity and impudence, occurred on the tour. A real estate dealer named Gross was actually successful in the local courts in suing both Rostand and Mansfield for appropriating and publicising the ideas of a play, considered by the author to resemble *Cyrano*, which he himself had written. Gross's play was entirely worthless from any point of view. But this fact did not prevent the judge from directing the jury in these terms: "We all know Mr Gross. He is a highly respected citizen. But what do we know of this young fellow Rostand?"

The ambition of Richard Mansfield's right-hand man had now found its true direction and was burning to assert itself in an independent capacity. Cochran had for the first time in his life shared in the promotion of a sensational stage success. The experience had not only been of immense service to him in developing his greatest gifts but had also kindled his enthusiasm for his vocation to flaming point. It was all very well to be indispensable to America's finest actor. But the masterful temperament of the secretary, now fully conscious of its creative impulse, could no longer bear dictation from any single individual, least of all from an individual whose authoritarian strain went as deep as his own.

Cochran told Mansfield that he wished to start in management on his own account. The magnate, as he always did when the issue was large enough, rose to the occasion with aristocratic altruism. He sincerely complimented and sincerely encouraged his 'personal representative,' then offered to send him back to England to find an actor and a play, to be financed by Mansfield himself. This Homeric gesture was accepted with fervour, in the spirit in which it was made. Charles B. Cochran, prospective manager, crossed the Atlantic Ocean for the fourth time and began to search his native land for playwrights and players who should give him a flying start in the second lap of his predestined course.

He met Ellaline Terriss, Sir Arthur Pinero and

Mr George Bernard Shaw He braved the terrors of British provincial hotels at their most virulent period But he did not find either the personality or the material that he was looking for. Mansfield cabled to him to return to America. In vain. The dogged manager-to-be stuck to his quest with characteristic tenacity. At last he discovered a comic opera company, touring with *Paul Jones*, that required a manager and preferably a manager with some experience of the country on behalf of which the celebrated seaman-adventurer named in the title of the opera had performed his most brilliant exploits (at the expense, incidentally, of the British) *Paul Jones* became highly successful under the management of Charles Cochran.

When the piece had toured itself out he set himself to procure engagements for the principal baritone, Templer Saxe, who introduced other singers, actors and various public entertainers to him. Soon Charles B. Cochran, theatrical and music-hall agent, had established offices in chambers at Chancery Lane and was doing as well as he expected for the moment, if not yet as well as he intended to do

His first really sensational client was Harry Houdini, the Handcuff King. This bow-legged man, of enormous physical strength, was able to escape from strait-jackets, sealed boxes, cans and water-tanks He laughed not only, like love, at locksmiths but also at every variety of shackle and fetter known to the mind of man. He was the despair of the

police—not, of course, that he was ever really 'wanted'—of two continents. But he made very respectable commissions for his agents, for, besides his titular accomplishments, he was a first-rate conjurer and card-manipulator, as well as rivalling his new impresario himself in the arts of pure showmanship.

It was at this period of Charles Cochran's career that he made an important discovery which had nothing to do with the theatre. One evening he was passing the *Tabard* publichouse in Bedford Park, a picturesque hostelry much frequented by the colony of actors and artists who then as now lived in the neighbourhood. From the hospitable door of the saloon bar emerged, to C.B.C.'s great astonishment—for Queen Victoria still sat upon the British throne—a pretty, well-dressed and refined-looking girl of about sixteen years of age, with her arms full of books. She was followed, and in fact accompanied, by a literary acquaintance of Cochran's, Mr. C. Ranger Gull, who wrote under the pseudonym of 'Guy Thorne.' Introductions were effected. Mr. Gull explained that he had 'dared' his youthful companion, Miss Evelyn Dade, to enter the saloon, for she had expressed a lively curiosity as to what on earth went on in such places to attract so many males of such diverse ages and characters.

This meeting turned out to be something more than a gay and laughable encounter. Charles Cochran determined that there should be many more

meetings. But the best-known truth about true love lived up to its reputation. Miss Dade herself was delighted with her new friend. But Miss Dade's widowed mother, a good deal more conventional than her daughter, considered Mr. Cochran not only 'too much of a man about town' to be a suitable companion for Evelyn, but also, in her own somewhat cryptic phrase, too much of a 'man about many towns,' perhaps a reference to the comparatively extensive travels of the young theatrical agent. A crisis developed.

Mrs. Dade packed her daughter off, in charge of an uncle, to a convent near Dublin. But Evelyn never reached the nunnery to which her resolute parent had consigned her. At Dublin railway station, by a curious coincidence with which the age-old expedient of a clandestine correspondence had something to do, a fresh-complexioned, sturdily-built young impresario, Charles Cochran by name, strolled airily past uncle and niece, who were standing on the platform at the door of the compartment which was to carry Evelyn to her undesired refuge from the 'man about many towns'. The uncle, who was not proceeding on this last stage of their journey, did not recognise the man of theatres, whom he had never met. But the niece did. A lightning glance of understanding flashed between the lovers. Uncle was a busy man. The train did not go for another ten minutes. His niece was now seated, to all appearance cheerfully resigned to her fate, in the

proper compartment, 'For Ladies Only.' Uncle lifted his hat, withdrew. Charles and Evelyn watched his respectable back pass out of the station exit, then flew into each other's arms.

A few days later they were standing before the Registrar of Marriages in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. And not many weeks later the magic Cochran charm and tact had got to work on Mrs Dade, who eventually gave the pardonable pair of culprits her long-deferred blessing.

But these events had been anticipated by several interesting developments in the career of Charles Cochran. He had long been anxious to introduce to a London audience the Parisian *revue*, suitably modified, to suit Mrs Grundy, from the form in which it was shown in the small boulevard theatres such as the Capucines. He arranged to produce a forty-minute spectacle on these lines at the Palace Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue, a house with which he has ever since, at various intervals, been closely associated. But it was found, at the last minute, that the project would conflict with the terms of the contemporary Licensing Act for music-halls, the law not recognising the new *genre*. The enterprise had accordingly to be dropped for the time being. Cochran had to nurse his pet idea until 1914. It was characteristic of him that he never dreamed of abandoning it. He was convinced that it would

'go' and the future was to prove him triumphantly right

Meanwhile, his reputation as an impresario increased steadily. His first London production, the short-lived *Sporting Simpson*, was launched at the Royalty Theatre on the 4th October, 1902. But quite apart from producing activities proper he was 'handling' with conspicuous success individual artists such as the *diseuse* Odette Dulac, second only to Yvette Guilbert in this medium, while discovering and 'marketing' such variegated types of female entertainer as Mistinguett, the perfect mimic, absolutely original in her style, of Parisian 'low-life' characters as Polaire, best remembered as the impersonator of the novelist Willy's heroine Claudine, and as Ethel Levey, one of the brightest particular 'variety' stars of pre-war London.

Then in 1903, he turned to a fresh, non-theatrical sphere of entertainment, made it his own, or in other words made it theatrical in the best sense, and soon had London immersed in one of the most remarkable 'crazes' it has ever known.

The Russian-born wrestler Georges Hackenschmidt had recently been brought to London from the Folies Bergères. He was one of the most superb physical specimens of humanity ever seen and in addition to this a kindly, modest, serious-minded young man who, after his retirement, founded a school of 'natural philosophy,' by which he seems to have meant psychological and religious integration

through simple systems of physical culture. He was once, moreover, actually called 'no fool' by no less ultimate an authority upon the moronic aberrations of the human race than Mr. George Bernard Shaw. But Hackenschmidt spoke no English on the occasion of his first visit to London. Partly owing to this disability and partly owing to his own retiring nature he made a decidedly poor self-advertiser. He had little success in England until Charles Cochran took him in hand.

At first there were comparative misfires at the Tivoli and in Liverpool. In the latter city an exciting street skirmish between rival sandwichmen, known subsequently as 'The Battle of Clayton Square,' signalised Cochran's introduction of Hackenschmidt. The local theatre manager feared for his licence if the wrestler should be allowed to appear and refused to admit his party to the premises hired. Cochran took legal advice, received encouraging counsel, forced an entry and defied the manager to put him out. His sandwichmen, advertising that the 'show' would duly take place, were charged by the manager's, explaining that it would not. Hackenschmidt and other wrestlers, reinforced by local bruisers, guarded the doors of the theatre against surprise attacks by the other side. Various tactics, including the cutting off of gas from the building, were employed without success by the enemy. Hackenschmidt appeared, wrestled and discomfited his opponents only too easily. It was

for this last reason that he proved less of a 'sensation' than had been anticipated. The public wanted a 'run for their money,' in other words matches that should be exciting because closely contested, not 'walk-overs'

Charles Cochran was moved, after this experience, to lecture his honest neophyte on the theory and practice of showmanship. He told Hackenschmidt that the word meant, in the domain of public wrestling, 'playing' with your adversary so as to make the spectators believe you were having difficulty in mastering him. Previously the simple sportsman that the Russian essentially was, had just gone 'all out' for a win, like the veriest amateur, with the result that there was nothing to see in his bouts but a handsome young Apollo putting various gorilla-like antagonists on their backs before you could say Jack Robinson. This ceased to be entertaining after the fourth or fifth repetition

Charles B. Cochran changed all that. At Manchester, after Liverpool, Georges dutifully 'played' to order and scored a roaring success. The Press began to call him 'The Russian Lion.' Wrestling, formerly confined to the interest of a few scattered handfuls of enthusiasts in the provinces, stormed London. Supply, as usual, strove frantically to meet demand. British champions were soon disposed of by the 'Lion.' Continental professionals began to arrive in the excited capital by almost every boat

On the 30th January, 1904, Mr. Cochran was able, in conjunction with certain other parties, to stage a grand bout at Olympia - the first time he had approached that historic arena in a professional capacity—between Hackenschmidt and Madrali, the so-called 'Terrible Turk,' a protégé of the famous retired wrestler Antonio Pierri, who had been the first to assume this formidable nickname. Madrali was a full-blooded Ottoman subject and possessed an ogreish appearance and reputation. He was said to be fed on nothing but huge sacks of rice

Madrali started a prime favourite with the *cognoscenti*. The sensitive Georges was horribly nervous until he actually set foot in the ring. But the moment the gong went he rushed at his opponent like a whirlwind, picked up the dreadful giant like a straw and hurled him to the mat with a resounding crash. Madrali made scarcely an effort to rise. It was found that both his arms were broken. From that instant Hackenschmidt became a national institution and no one minded financing him, in spite of his truly prodigious voracity.

Mr. Cochran tells an amusing story of the first and only time he and his wife entertained Georges Hackenschmidt to dinner. The amiable young wrestler consumed eight or nine eggs as *hors d'œuvres*, went on to a porterhouse steak with garnishings and finished up by devouring a whole Camembert cheese. Mrs Cochran, in some trepidation, for there was hardly anything left to eat in

the house, then enquired whether the guest would care to take any further nourishment Hackenschmidt excused himself on the ground that he was engaged to sup with a few friends a little later in the evening and didn't want to take the edge off his appetite

The next professional wrestler with whom Cochran was concerned—for, like the good business-man he is he was now striking continuously while the iron was hot—rejoiced in the onomatopœic patronymic of Zbysco. It would be difficult to imagine a name that would be more suited to whistling breath, hurtling limbs and the thud of avoirdupois on the mat. Zbysco was a Galician from Cracow and as ugly as Hackenschmidt was handsome. But he was an honest, good-natured fellow, well educated, and belonged to a good family. Cochran personally arranged for his journey to London and provided him with well-paid 'volunteer' opponents, who followed him from town to town, *pour encourager les autres*. A characteristic stroke of Cochranian showmanship

In contrast to these comparatively intellectual wrestlers the cowboy hypnotist Ahrensmeyer, installed by C B C for a considerable period at the Holborn Empire about this date, could scarcely read or write. But he had sufficient 'will power,' it appeared, to compel, from a distance of some miles, the sick Georges Hackenschmidt to rise from his bed and give a performance well up to his usual smashing

form. Thus did the astute promoter, not for the first or last time, hoist, to mix a metaphor, two birds with one petard. Ahrensmeyer used regularly to hypnotise, publicly and gratis, at ten o'clock in the morning in the lobby of the Holborn Empire, a woman who remained in the administered trance, on view to all and sundry, for the rest of the day.

Sensations were already multiplying under the keen nose and persuasive alchemy—“You’re so damned *persuasive*!” exclaimed Robert Loraine to Charles Cochran the rising young impresario at a later date.

A sensation that was to prove more permanent than either wrestling or hypnotism was a magnification of the old-time attractions of Lindfield Common. This was an idea that had been simmering in Cochran’s mind ever since his boyhood. He staged at Olympia at Christmas, 1906, the first Mammoth Fun City—this original title was his own invention—ever seen in this country. The result, which was highly successful, taught him one lesson at least which he never forgot. The ‘public’ love to be tricked. They are most often merely bored by a straightforward show, however interesting it may be to the reflective mind, especially if it is likely to cause argument among scientists. The pigmy families on view at Olympia that Christmas attracted few and mostly indifferent visitors. But the Fasting Man and the Sacred Bull of India were surrounded by dense and tense crowds from morning till night.

Having tested the almost infinite potentialities for the showman of the vast Olympia building the equally resourceful provider of national entertainments, as Cochran could now fairly be called, inaugurated there in 1909 London's next great 'craze,' the roller-skating boom that succeeded the wrestling vogue started by Cochran plus Hackenschmidt. He had seen successful and popular roller-skating rinks being run by an American named C P Crawford in Newcastle and Liverpool. He saw no reason why London should not take up the sport, which combined all the amenities of dancing with a more strenuous and unfamiliar form of exercise, not too difficult to learn and great fun in learning, as he had gathered from watching the giggling neophytes in the two provincial cities. He persuaded Crawford to come to Olympia and join him in reviving for the inhabitants of the capital a pastime with rather a curious history.

Wheeled skates had been used on the roads of Holland as far back as the eighteenth century. But it was the invention in New York in 1863 of the four-wheeled skate working on rubber pads that first turned an originally utilitarian practice into a relaxation. Roller-skating swept Europe in the 'eighties, but subsequently languished. The strict social conventions of the last two decades of the nineteenth century frowned upon the opportunities for promiscuous flirtation which the use of the rinks encouraged. Such opportunities were also rife on

ice, out of doors. But ice in most European countries is not everywhere available and where it can be found can only be used for a few months at best during the year and even then is frequently interrupted by inclement weather. Moreover, enclosed buildings afford secluded corners for prolonged *tête-à-tête*, seductive refreshments, romantic lighting effects and other perils for the susceptible. Too many handsome instructors ran off with their pupils. Too many undesirable characters began to frequent arenas originally designed for innocent amusement. The rinks got a bad reputation and were boycotted by decent people.

But with the freer manners of the early twentieth century, the Edwardian era in England, the times were ripe for a resuscitation of roller-skating, though it took the genius of a Cochran to realise the fact and profit from it. London, as everyone over forty remembers, went roller-skating mad in 1909, as it was to go artificial ice-skating mad in 1934.

The Continent, where the New Woman was less common and natural ice more often available, did not follow suit. Charles Cochran was made managing director of Winslow's Continental Skating Rinks, with headquarters in Berlin. But he found that the fresh-air loving Germans, with their drier climate, though the sale of roller-skates duly boomed, preferred to skate free of charge and official control along their excellent public roads, then as now the

best in Europe, rather than indoors. In Paris, a less strenuous and more fickle populace soon tired of the new pastime, which also, in that gay city, assumed, almost at once, in flagrant form many of the inconvenient features, from respectability's point of view, which had formerly driven it from general popularity in London. In England, however, the craze lasted steadily till the outbreak of war in 1914.

Of all careers the showman's is fullest of those odd occurrences and surprising discoveries that generate the best because the truest humorous anecdotes. At least two typical tales of this crowded beginning of an endlessly variegated experience in entertainment must here be recorded. Mr Cochran, like Mr. Walter de la Mare, has always had a particular affection for midgets. One evening he engaged a large circular table in the middle of the Savoy Restaurant for forty guests. When the procession entered the crammed dining-room at a suitably late hour, headed by its stalwart host, the wealthy patrons of this world-famous temple of the palate were astounded to perceive that not one of the guests for the centre table was more than three feet tall. The 'Tiny Town' banquet riveted the eyes of all present for the rest of the evening and an enormous advertisement was obtained for the Midget Exhibition which Charles Cochran was then promoting.

On another occasion, about this date, he took to

New York a trainer of performing fleas. But these engaging insect prodigies did not survive the transatlantic crossing. They were all stiff and cold before the Statue of Liberty was sighted. One would have thought it a comparatively simple matter to replace the perished contingent with new recruits for training in a metropolis so abounding in humble types of humanity as New York then was. But for days on end Charles Cochran and his latest 'sensation' searched slums, 'dead ends' and immigrant quarters in vain for a single example of the appropriate species of *Culex Irritans*. Finally, a wire had to be sent to California for a consignment. But even California, which can produce most things to order, seemed rather staggered by this unusual request. Eventually, however, a box full of promising young blood-suckers arrived. But by that time the temperamental trainer, in despair, had returned to England, where he could get as many fleas as he wanted without the slightest trouble. Charles Cochran, on this occasion, had reason to deplore the superior hygienic environment of the New World.

While he was in Berlin in connection with the roller-skating rinks he met the fourth man whose personality was destined to have a decisive effect upon the still comparatively youthful manager's development. The genius of Max Reinhardt, the Austrian theatrical producer, is probably even more capacious than was that of Arthur Roberts, Aubrey Beardsley or Richard Mansfield. At this period,

as director first of the Neues Theater, then of the Deutsches Theater, in Berlin, he was leading the neo-romantic movement against the prevailing school of naturalism, interpreting in turn, from this point of view, essentially dramatic rather than literary and historical, Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Strindberg, Wedekind, Ibsen and Shaw among many other playwrights. The innovations of this great *régisieur* in settings, costumes, lighting arrangements and in fact almost every department of stage production, enraptured Cochran, especially in *Sumurun* and *Ædipus Rex*, the latter play performed on an open circular platform entirely surrounded by the audience.

Up to this moment, though Cochran had seen and appreciated many beautiful theatrical productions in New York and in London and often longed to outdo them, he had been too busy establishing a reputation as a purveyor of startling 'sensations' to allow himself to think exclusively of the deeper intoxications of the human spirit. Now his reputation was made, he had money or knew where and how to get it. His sensitivity to visual beauty and to pure dramatic art took, for the first time, complete charge of him. It is characteristic of the abiding prudence of the man not to have anticipated his hour. It is equally characteristic of his daring and passionate imagination to have leaped at once, when the hour struck, to the heights.

With Olympia fresh in his mind and Reinhardt's

talk of plays staged in unusual settings including, as it happened, cathedrals, it was not difficult for a creative mind to connect the two ideas. Why not turn Olympia into a cathedral and produce a play in it? The obstacles to this grandiose project would have completely balked an average impresario at the very start. Not so C B C, who had yet, like the French marshal, to find the word 'impossible' in his dictionary. He talked for all he was worth to Reinhardt who soon recognised that he was dealing with a man of fine vision as well as colossal practical energy and ability.

A certain Karl Vollmüller, one of Reinhardt's friends and a distinguished dramatic poet, was commissioned to draft a scenario suitable for the setting envisaged by the two producers. In twenty-four hours Vollmüller had sketched out in dramatic form an old High German legend about the experiences of a runaway nun and her subsequent return to the fold, where her place had been taken by the Virgin Mary herself. Maeterlinde had written a play, *Sœur Beatrice*, on the subject, and John Davidson a ballad. A composer of European reputation, Engelbert Humperdinck, best known for his charming children's opera, *Hansel und Gretel*, agreed to supply music for this libretto, Ernst Stern, an exceedingly versatile Rumanian artist, designed costumes, accessories and the detail of the cathedral *décor*, which was to be modelled on that of Cologne.

Among the two thousand dresses invented by

Stern for the production of *The Miracle* at Olympia on Christmas Eve, 1911, there were very few duplicates. Fifteen hundred were used by an enormous cast, every member of which was personally selected by Charles Cochran. These included a chorus of five hundred and an orchestra of two hundred. The two principal female parts, the Nun and the Madonna, were played by a Russian dancer, Natasha Trouhanova, and an Italian lady, the wife of Herr Vollmüller, respectively, Frau Vollmüller taking the name of Maria Carmi for the occasion.

In connection with the choice of the former player some entertaining scenes took place at the country cottage of Herr Humperdinck, near Munich. Charles Cochran took the dancer to see Reinhardt, who was living at a second cottage in the neighbourhood, but here the accommodation was inadequate for an audition and local hostilities, scandalised at the lady's decorative appearance, refused facilities. It was decided to invade Humperdinck's more commodious residence. Frau Humperdinck, a wife and mother of severe and simple tastes, received the exotic guest with considerably less enthusiasm than her youthful son, still in his teens. Natasha retired to the conjugal bedroom to prepare for her exhibition dance and reappeared in diaphanous underclothing straight from the rue de la Paix. The horrified *hausfrau* hustled her protesting offspring into an adjoining room and insisted that Herr Humperdinck

should play his accompaniments with his back to the performance. The dances were duly given, everyone except Frau Humperdinck was delighted—even her young son who peeped round the door at intervals—and Natasha Trouhanova was engaged. She and Cochran left at once for Munich, unrefreshed by their Spartan hostess, who did not even offer them a cup of coffee. Cochran heard afterwards that the moment after their departure Frau Humperdinck opened every window in the house to rid the air of the contaminating perfumes shed by the actress and also whisked a towel over the nuptial couch profaned by the contact of Parisian vanities of silk and lace.

The Miracle scored Cochran's greatest success to date. He had undertaken the most vast and complex operation of his career and carried it through with scarcely a hitch. But far more important than this huge compliment to his business ability, with all that the phrase implies of tact and strategical virtues, was the character of the piece itself. Most people in the theatrical world knew Cochran as an adventurous and original-minded producer. Few of them had hitherto realised his fine taste and ideas as an artist. *The Miracle* was beautiful both as a spectacle and in its emotional implications. No touch of vulgarity or exaggeration marred its effects. It was thrilling in the best sense, without 'sensation' or sentimentality, grandly lavish without ostentation, simply and deeply moving without prejudice to the action, in short, in Cochran's own words, highly significant of

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his professional standpoint, 'a fine piece of theatrical art and production' He aimed then and has aimed since no higher and no lower.

The Press was generally enthusiastic; *The Times* critic wrote of an 'impressive and at certain moments very beautiful display . . . deeply moving and pleasing.' The music disappointed him But amidst so much visual splendour and movement people scarcely listened to it

Certain discordant notes, however, interrupted the hymns of praise. 'Made in Germany' was a catchword of the moment, epitomising the new industrial advances of that country and Britain's annoyance with her upstart competitor Ill-willed critics made the most of it, though no one could call *The Miracle* a cheap substitute for anything. It was profoundly imagined, beautifully given by all concerned and cost £3,500. Nevertheless, the German-sounding names of many of the participants and the fact that its conception took place in Germany, militated against the production in a year of anti-German feeling and even war-scare.

A second assault came from the very quarter which might have been expected to be most friendly The Protestant Churches lodged a loud complaint of 'Popery' and censured with a full blast of *odium theologicum* the seductions of Rome to be experienced at Olympia In this connection one may note with amusement and admiration how C.B.C. is always ready to turn even hostility into

advertisement. The famous journalist, W. T. Stead sent him two letters written for publication, one a reasoned, cultivated and appreciative criticism, the other a very thinly veiled innuendo, and invited Cochran to choose which he would prefer to appear. The great impresario did not hesitate for a moment. He chose the second. It was duly printed and increased box-office receipts to a far higher figure than the first could possibly have stimulated them to achieve. Typical sentences in this second letter read as follows.

"How much, sir, do you receive from the secret service money of the Vatican or from the coffers of the Jesuits for this imposing and magnificent propaganda in favour of the Roman Catholic Church? . . . I wonder whether they (the Protestants) are going to take it lying down? . . ." The letter went on to refer to "widespread suspicions of an informal conspiracy got up by Rome and Germany for the destruction of the British Empire."

Whether on such accounts as are outlined above or because the British public was maintaining its reputation for indifference to drama above the level of slapstick and rant, and in spite of golden opinions from every thoughtful and unprejudiced person in the country, *The Miracle* did not look like paying its way until it was temporarily rescued by an altogether unanticipated champion.

Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, who hardly ever went to a theatre, paid a surprise visit

to Olympia one afternoon, asking Cochran to sit next him and 'explain everything' Cochran hinted that the production was so far financially disappointing. The great newspaper man at once saw a first-rate opportunity to boost still farther his own already prodigious power. He proposed to prove to the world that the *Daily Mail* could make or mar anything, including any number of *Miracles*. The equally shrewd impresario was only too delighted to give him a free hand to try.

Next day a letter from Mr. Hamilton Fyfe appeared in the *Daily Mail* expressing the utmost astonishment at the 'beggarly rows' of spectators to be seen at such a grand feast of dramatic art. The following morning Cochran received an enquiry over the telephone from the paper. What were the actual box-office figures of the last two days? The reply was a brilliant exercise in showmanly generalship, Charles Cochran told the *Daily Mail* representative that since Mr. Fyfe's letter receipts had substantially increased. The contrary was actually the case. But the result of this dexterous 'white lie' was electrical. The *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*, next morning, boasted of the former paper's successful intervention on behalf of a splendid cause. Thereafter, for weeks, each paper carried regular 'features,' 'booming' the production at Olympia and publishing soaring figures which this time bore a recognisable relation to the truth. It looked as if *The Miracle* were saved by a miracle of Press

organisation. Receipts climbed from five thousand to thirteen thousand pounds a week.

Yet, by one of those typical ironies of the history of human endeavour, which Cochran was to come to know as well as any other worker on grand scales, *The Miracle* had to be withdrawn from Olympia before it could make a profit, in order to make room for the 1912 Ideal Home Exhibition of the *Daily Mail* itself! No second home in England could be found for this unprecedentedly elaborate and gigantic poem in design, movement and music. But it was as nobly produced in New York, ten years later, though not by Charles Cochran, with a superb and supreme Madonna in the lovely Lady Diana Duff Cooper.

Cochran's name was now familiar in the most exalted circles of London society. At Whitsun, 1912, he helped Mrs Cornwallis West (Lady Randolph Churchill) in the establishment of a 'Shakespeare's England' section in the Exhibition at Earl's Court, so conspicuous a feature of post-Edwardian and pre-war London. Mrs. Cornwallis West presented her brilliant assistant to King George V and Queen Mary. Charles Cochran took the royal children, Princess Mary, Prince Henry and Prince George, for a ride on the 'scenic railway' at Earl's Court. He has recorded¹ how tightly their small fingers gripped his temporarily avuncular coat-sleeve as the car rushed down the steep gradients.

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, p 182

That August the producer of *The Miracle* fulfilled a further lifelong ambition in the world of entertainment by organising for the first time in his life a complete circus. This was presented at the Empress Hall adjacent to the grounds of the Exhibition at Earl's Court. It attracted an enormous number of visitors, not only because the weather was very wet that summer. Like all the Cochran shows this circus was unique in certain important respects. For the first time in England animals were seen in their natural surroundings, apparently at liberty, not behind bars, but with deep and wide trenches separating them from the spectators, who were thus enabled to mingle the thrills of quite imaginary danger with their æsthetic, scientific or merely fascinated curiosity. This innovation was derived from the practice of Karl Hagenbeck of Hamburg, with whom Cochran had come into contact while arranging the preliminary steps for the production of the circus.

Hagenbeck, a distinguished zoologist and explorer, had been exhibiting ever since 1875, throughout all the large cities of Europe, animals representative of many countries. In 1891, the French Government recognised the educational value of his presentations by awarding him the Diploma of the Academy. He invented the system of planning, with the substitution of trenches for cages, which was used at Earl's Court as at Yellowstone National Park in the United States.

Cochran's Wonder Zoo and Big Circus included lions, tigers, bears, two hundred and fifty circus horses and five hundred Barbary apes. But of all these animals perhaps Max and Moritz, the chimpanzee trick cyclists, are best remembered. Descriptions of and commentaries on their astounding abilities and engaging mannerisms filled the newspapers for many weeks after the Silly Season of the summer holidays was over and done with.

By the time the fateful summer of 1914 was moving to its terrible climax, Charles Cochran had made several reputations. He was known as an expert on theatrical conditions in two continents, as a successful impresario who would 'handle' anyone from conjurers, flea-trainers and hypnotists to singers, *diseuses* and wrestlers, so long as the entertainer's particular line put him in a class by himself. This new type of theatrical agent was respected by artists and æsthetes and their critics who had seen his *Miracle*. He was, in addition, a fresh force and a highly popular one in the international *milieu* of the circus. He had started two 'crazes,' wrestling and roller-skating, in England. He had become one of those representative personalities about whom stories are told and legends created, as they are about political or military leaders.

The stories and legends presented the portrait of a man of forty-two who looked like a boyish, jolly clubman, behaved like an inspired poet in

conceiving his enterprises and ran them like ten business-barons rolled into one. There was no one he could not 'get round' and no one who could 'get round' him unless he permitted it, as he often did, out of sheer magnanimity. The large lines upon which the man thought, felt and acted resemble those of the aristocrats of meditation, emotion and behaviour. And he dealt only with the aristocrats, the 'best people,' of his chosen world of entertainment.

There was one sphere, obvious enough to us to-day now that he has brought it into general prominence, which he had not yet touched in London, though he had 'managed' an exhibition boxer in Cincinnati while he was in his twenties. Boxing in the England of 1914, outside the schools, the universities, the services and a few circles of enthusiastic amateurs, had fallen to a comparatively low ebb. This was chiefly due to the lack of public organisation, though the National Sporting Club did what it could with the funds at its disposal. Cochran saw here yet another chance of introducing variety, excitement, seriousness and a wider appeal into a department of British life that deserved a more important position than it had occupied since the decline of the bare-fist days.

He began at Olympia, on June 30th, 1914, by presenting the Australian welter-weight Stone against the Englishman Johnny Summers, and the

Australian heavy-weight, Colin Bell *versus* Bombardier Wells. These contests were notable for two features which illustrate admirably Cochran's original and effective technique in promotion. Some weeks previous to the fights he started a newspaper controversy which became gradually furious on the subject of the attendance of women at boxing matches. On the night itself the spectators were amazed to see a Roman Catholic priest in full canonicals enter the ring as official Master of Ceremonies. The match between Stone and Summers was a magnificent draw in both senses of the word, no decision being reached except that Cochran was the crack showman of his day. Wells knocked out Bell in the second round.

Cochran has written¹ that casting a boxing match is more difficult than casting a play. But from 1914 onwards he rarely made a mistake in either direction.

In July, he staged at Olympia a fight between the Englishman, Freddy Welsh and the American, Willie Ritchie, for the light-weight championship of the world. Welsh won on points in the twentieth round.

But the shadow of a greater 'sensation' than any showman but Fate can produce was already falling across the world. In August, 1914, most prominent people and a good proportion of the whole nation itself turned from the ordinary business

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, p. 292

of earning a livelihood to some form of war service. In the face of this crisis, theatrical workers, unless they were eligible to serve in the actual fighting forces, found themselves fortunate in belonging, like doctors, to one of the very few professions that could 'carry on as usual' Britain had to be kept psychologically as well as physically fit to bear her terrible new burdens. In this department it was obvious enough that the stage could do more for the country than any other public institution, official or unofficial Charles Cochran threw the whole weight of his now thoroughly matured creative energy into the extremely exacting task of 'keeping the home fires burning' in the heart of England

CHAPTER III

WAR AND POST-WAR

HE has always enjoyed doing several different things at the same time. In this hectic August, when European society was being shaken up, as in a dice-box, preparatory to the cast that was to decide its fate for years to come, new ideas and situations, new feelings and new contrasts, came suddenly to oust the ways of the old world. Cochran, needless to say, was at once completely at home in this atmosphere. It was admirably suited to create scope for his peculiar genius.

Immediately and triumphantly he revived a project first planned long ago at the Palace Theatre and then checkmated by the provisions of the Music Halls Licensing Act. He foresaw correctly that the time was now ripe for the production at a new theatre of an English *revue intime* along Continental lines. The Ambassadors' Theatre in Seven Dials was leased. A French *comédienne*, Alice Delysia, first seen by Cochran at the Olympia in Paris, was engaged. Harry Grattan wrote a brilliant libretto, of a type hitherto unknown to London audiences in its informal, almost confi-



dential style. Its central idea had been derived by Cochran from a story he had heard of a troupe of English dancing girls being stranded on the Continent upon the outbreak of war. In Grattan's revue a theatrical company arrives at an unknown theatre at dead of night and decides to give an impromptu performance

Plain black curtains were used as a backcloth to emphasise the improvised nature of the turns and also, as the manager himself astutely pointed out in the programme, 'to spare no economy' in accordance with the political anti-waste campaign then already in full swing. Mr. Cochran was duly taken to task by a Scotch reviewer of the *revue* for misusing the English language for the occasion of this mild verbal quip. But *Odds and Ends*, as the piece was called, went with a swing from start to finish. Its spirit was thoroughly in tune with the new *camaraderie* and the new zest for gay and unconventional adventure. Mr. Cochran himself considers it¹ 'the best *revue* ever presented in London.' Delysia, former wife of the dead English comedian, Harry Fragson, scored a tremendous success and became at once a permanent favourite with British audiences. Her salary was at first six pounds a week. But this figure was soon left far behind, for *Odds and Ends* ran for no fewer than five hundred nights.

Such was the trump card with which C.B.C.

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, p. 199

inaugurated, in October, 1914, his war-time tricks in London. Soon after he had played it Sir Alfred Butt offered him the general management of the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square, thereby recognising him as a national institution. For the 'Empire' had long been the most admired recreational centre for every man of British birth who ever troubled to attend a stage performance. Cochran signalled his new office by a typically scintillating brainwave. He engaged a man who was then one of the most popular civilian heroes in Britain, Horatio Bottomley, to deliver regular patriotic speeches at the 'Empire' for the enormous but perfectly well-judged fee of a hundred pounds a night.

The first composite triumph at the 'Empire' under Cochran's management was the *revue Watch Your Step*, starring Ethel Levey, Joe Coyne and George Graves. Irving Berlin composed the 'jazz' music. The world-famous French clown, Grock, joined the cast at Christmas. War-busy London, not yet depressed by a struggle that no one but Kitchener dreamed would last another four years, besieged the historic portals. The selection of Grock was yet another example of the manager's daring defiance of the rules of the game he played. The experiment, however, was justified, like so many others he risked, by the event. Grock had made his name as a circus clown, depending largely, as all

such performers do, upon that familiarly intimate contact between himself and the spectators that is nearly always impossible across a row of footlights on a square stage open only in front. But Cochran was convinced that Grock's peculiar excellence would 'go' anywhere, even upon the enclosed and comparatively remote platform of an ordinary theatre. He was right. And since theatrical audiences at this time covered a far wider section of society than circus spectators, Grock, though his art was wordless, joined instantly the ranks of the great comedians known all over the world.

During 1915 and 1916 the reckless thirst for distraction, the more unconventional the better, of a nation driven to the extremities of its capacity for endurance by the toil and hardship of war, mounted steadily. The second *revue* at the 'Ambassadors', entitled *More*, and reinforcing Delysia with Iris Hoey and the French comedian Leon Morton, continued to cram the house, as did its successor, *Pell Mell*. The transplantation of the Parisian boulevard theatre to the West End of London, first thought of and engineered by Charles Cochran, was complete. It was an exploit that no former or contemporary manager would have believed possible. War-time relaxations certainly helped the idea to succeed. But the main credit for the establishment of a permanent feature of present-day entertainment in this country must

go to the man who dared to assume that the Englishman was not so conservative or so insular as he thought himself

Musical comedy was another matter. Two of these hardy annuals or rather perennials, but with characteristic differences in looseness of structure and variety of appeal, were produced by Cochran in 1916. *Half-Past Eight* was staged at the Comedy Theatre and *Houp La* at the 'St. Martin's'. At the same time, very typically, he turned his attention to serious drama. Eugène Brieux, the Parisian playwright, had written *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* in 1897. This piece was a powerful if somewhat brutal study of the miseries imposed on middle-class girls of scanty means by the French dowry system. *Les Avaries* (1901), translated into English as *Damaged Goods*, dealt even more frankly with a 'social evil,' to wit, venereal disease, and had been forbidden by the censor in Paris on account of its unsavoury medical details. Cochran produced English versions of both these plays, being enabled to get the latter past the Lord Chamberlain owing to the sudden national urgency of the theme, due to war conditions. *Damaged Goods*, naturally, proved nearly as popular as the *revues*, if for rather different reasons.

In 1917 Charles Cochran found himself behind the biggest commercial success of the whole war-time theatrical world of London. He produced the caricaturist Bairnsfather's *The Better 'Ole* at the

Oxford Music Hall, putting on the stage the immortal features of that already classic warrior, Old Bill, and his mate Albert. The play itself was a crude enough piece of work. But nothing could be more topical, and besides occasional judicious doses of pathos it administered in the course of each evening three hundred loud laughs. Arthur Bouchier, rather below his best form, appeared as Old Bill. Herman Darewski wrote the music. *The Better 'Ole* achieved the extraordinary total of eight hundred and seventeen consecutive performances. Max Pemberton publicly called the producer 'a really great showman' in days when the word 'great' was not yet being used of anything that happened to amuse Tom, Dick and Harry for an hour or so. The inevitable 'Cochran touch' was duly given by the interpolation, in a piece which was essentially a farce, of a playlet dominated by the Shakespearian actress Sybil Thorndike, destined to become, after the war, one of London's major tragedy queens.

Next to *The Better 'Ole* Londoners who were playgoers in war-time will recall most clearly the revue '*As You Were*,' produced by Charles Cochran at the Pavilion in August, 1918, when the tide of war had at last begun to turn in favour of the Allies. This piece ran for a year. The witty librettist Arthur Wimperis contrived in its 'book' perhaps his best adaption from the French, not least in the substitution of a topically military title for the *Plus Ça Change* of the original revue by 'Rip.' The music

was again by Darew-ski. The great French dress-maker Paul Poiret provided designs for the costumes. Delysia, free now from her sensationally felicitous contract at the 'Ambassadors,' starred before an audience that had long taken her to its heart. In connection, by the way, with this gifted lady's masquerade on this occasion as Lucifer, in black silk tights which scared the 'unco guid' and also annoyed, as usual, a certain coterie of high-browed killjoys who are always with us, Charles Cochran wrote¹ the characteristic and illuminating sentence: "I often wonder why it is that dramatic critics have such a dislike for the female form, which the average man finds most attractive."

Nothing could more simply and forcibly express at the same time the healthy outlook of an honestly civilised European and the right answer to the strange mixture of sentimental hypocrisy and intellectual pomposity shown by so many British pundits, otherwise exceptionally able and well informed judges of art, the moment they have to deal, in the normal prosecution of their profession, with any of the sexual aspects of society.

Many good stories might be told about *As You Were* (one of the best is that it earned twenty-one thousand pounds in royalties for the author). But perhaps the most superbly comic tale about any of Cochran's productions at this date is that of the 'Vision of Nelson.' Soon after the Armistice a

¹ *Secrets of a Showman*, p. 247

piece called *Jolly Jack Tar* was written by Seymour Hicks and Arthur Shirley and shown by Charles Cochran at the Princes Theatre. It was a somewhat weird mixture of melodrama, musical comedy, *revue* and cinematographic effects and did not last long. But it is memorable in the annals of the British theatre for one glorious incident. At a certain point in the play a naval captain rather incredibly knelt down in his cabin, on the eve of a great battle, and prayed for guidance. The next bit of 'business' was scheduled to comprise the entry of the ghost of Nelson to encourage the diffident captain. This 'vision' was ordinarily contrived on the stage by an ingenious use of mirrors. But one night one of the mirrors was set at the wrong angle and alongside of the dignified figure of the heroic admiral the audience beheld an even more realistic reflection, that of a couple of scene-shifters eating a well-earned supper of bread and cheese and drinking copious draughts of beer. The roar of rapture with which this unrehearsed addition to the tableau was received nearly lifted the roof off the theatre.

The end of the international conflict found Charles Cochran several more rungs up the ladder of fame and with a very complete retort to any busybody who might feel inclined—one hardly supposes anyone did—to make the historic demand. "What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?" The Cochran *revues* and other theatrical pieces from

1914 to 1918 did more to hearten the nation to carry out its grim task to the very end than a dozen organisations more directly concerned to 'win the war.'

In 1919 the 'Great Showman,' as he now began to be called by an ever-increasing band of 'fans,' added the 'Garrick,' the 'Aldwych' and the Holborn Stadium to his temporary managerial bag, the last being used, of course, for boxing only. It was at the 'Garrick' that he first produced Robert Loraine as Cyrano de Bergerac, the part doubly created before the war by Coquelin and Richard Mansfield. The settings in this first London version were by Edmond Dulac and the piece was soon moved to more commodious premises at Drury Lane. Loraine had something of Cochran's own type of genius in his bold, versatile and beauty-worshipping character, as well as in his vast energy and capacity for work. The two strong men clashed occasionally, for Cochran was often 'damned persuasive,' in the actor's own words, and Loraine's headlong will and impulsive temper could brook little opposition. But they were each too big to clash long. Loraine was a wilder Cyrano than Mansfield, perhaps nearer to Rostand's own conception of his hero. In any case few Londoners over thirty-five are likely to forget what they owed in 1919 to C B's enterprise in so effectively staging this grand and extraordinary play.

The production of *Afgar*, in which Delysia starred

at the 'Pavilion' in September, was notable for a further Cochranian innovation, this time to be credited to his commercial *flair*. In the first week there were 'record' box-office sales. C.B.C. dared to increase his prices slightly, dead against hitherto accepted business principles. He soon found that he had established a new one, viz., that if you charge more than people expect they will pay your price in the belief—justified in this case—that they will get for their money something better than they originally expected.

Afgar nearly failed to pass the censor. Lord Sandhurst, a charming and venerable gentleman of the old school, was at that time exercising the office of Lord Chamberlain. He called Cochran's attention to a certain line in the play which he considered 'objectionable.' The line in question read:

"The girls don't seem to fall for me as they used to do."

"We all know," said Lord Sandhurst gravely, "What is meant by a 'fallen woman,' do we not?"

It took Charles Cochran quite a long time to explain to his lordship the innocent meaning of the Americanism to which exception had been taken.

People certainly 'fell for' *Delysia* in droves at this period. Her 'sex appeal' was the rage as far afield as Oklahoma, if a wireless message actually received by Cochran on board a transatlantic liner this year is to be taken seriously.

This remarkable communication read as follows:

C*

"SUN newspaper states you are bringing your show AFGAR from London with Miss Delysia to our country. Saw show London last September. It must not come here. It is beautiful but its exotic, sensual note, combined with prohibition, will produce disastrous results on our youth. I am a rich man and just. I would not deprive Miss Delysia of her five thousand dollar salary without compensation. I will sacrifice myself by marrying her and offer her a home at Tulsa, a large tract of land adjoining proven oil territory, three complete drilling plants and one hundred thousand dollars cash. Affectionate disposition, artistic temperament. Photograph follows. If lady accepts offer I will follow photograph. Refer as to character and financial position F. W. Adshire, President First State Bank, Oilton, Oklahoma, Leennell Carreras, Tulsa, Oklahoma."

Literary immortality has been earned by paragraphs far less entertaining than this. Delysia and Leennell, if they could have appeared on the stage together, would probably have imposed the greatest 'sensation' of the century.

The war period have been, for Charles Cochran, on the whole one of gorgeous frivolity in his special domain. The workers and warriors demanded the light fantastic note and their showman saw to it that the note should sound in splendour. He was now, however, ready for keener effects, as for example a prodigy altogether new to British audiences, the

acting of Lucien Guitry, the master of subtle restraint, in plays by his son Sacha. The theatre obtained for the Guitrys by Cochran was the 'Aldwych' and the principal actress co-opted was Viola Tree.

At this same time the Holborn Stadium, under Cochran's direction, was being established as the most popular local habitation of the post-war boxing boom—really a continuation of the pre-war enthusiasm, also mainly due to C B C. The prosperity of boxing after the war could perhaps be chiefly attributed to the enhanced virility of the returned soldier. It was officially encouraged by authorities painfully reminded recently of the international importance of physical fitness. Cochran was already well experienced in boxing promotion, in which he had been interested ever since his first youth in New York. He launched his energetic genius zestfully on the rising wave of national favour towards this sport.

On the 27th February, 1919, at the Holborn Stadium, that tough and dogged but somewhat unenterprising heavy-weight, Joe Beckett, beat a much better boxer but a temperamental and erratic personality in Bombardier Billy Wells, who had knocked out the Australian Colin Bell under the Cochran ægis at Olympia before the war. On the 15th May a return match was arranged with a similar result. The iron-framed Joseph, whose speciality was taking punishment, but who, according

to *The Times*, had "little idea of boxing, a poor defence and an inept power of hitting," nevertheless knocked the handsome Billy flat out with very little trouble. Beckett was never a popular boxer. He was not pretty to look at, either in repose or on the move, he was boastful, practically illiterate, greedy, irresponsible and jumpy in the 'nerves.' It would be too much to say that he illustrated one Bat Masterson's dictum that "the average professional boxer has a brain which does not make more than one revolution every twenty-four hours." But Beckett was a trial to his promoters because he could never see farther than his rather flat nose.

Nevertheless, the indefatigable and 'damned persuasive' Charles Cochran managed to bring Joe Beckett to Olympia in June, where he knocked out, in the second round, the gigantic ex-guardsman Frank Goddard, thus qualifying to meet Georges Carpentier. A month later Cochran, sitting in the Royal Box at Olympia with the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, at the former's invitation, saw Jimmy Wilde, the eccentric little Welshman, win on points against the American bantam-weight Pal Moore, giving an amazing display of the skill and hitting power which Beckett largely lacked, as well as of the stamina which the big man possessed in abundance.

This affair, like all the other Cochran boxing shows, might almost be described as a social function, so well was it conducted and so many were the 'society

lions' who, as in the great days of the old bare-fist prize-ring, attended.

The next great contest celebrated under these brilliant and now far-famed auspices was one which aroused more interest and more disappointment throughout the world than any other boxing encounter before or since, the Beckett-Carpentier match in November, 1919. The date fixed was originally the 2nd September. But the Frenchman, only recently demobilised and having lately shown poorish form against Dick Smith in Paris, was not yet considered fit by his manager, M. Descamps. The match was postponed. Charles Cochran, in order not to disappoint prospective spectators who had been nursed for weeks on the anticipation of a sensational fight, staged at Olympia, on the 2nd, a substitute exhibition which was characterised as 'crazy' in the Press for its mammoth prodigality. The munificent showman contributed his own apologia to the newspapermen in an article entitled 'I Am Not Mad.' Six first-class boxers appeared, among a horde of lesser lights. Fulton beat Townley, Beckett beat M'Goorty, Basham beat Charles (not C.B.C. himself but a professional boxer of that surname). No one could complain that he did not get his money's worth on this occasion. This magnanimous 'gesture' was typical of the man who made it and illustrates one of the secrets of his unprecedented success as 'Lord Bountiful.'

At last the even greater day came. "I cannot

imagine," writes Cochran in his *Secrets of a Showman* (p. 309), "any arena in the world so big that it would not have been filled by the Beckett-Carpentier match." Yet Olympia, with its capacity for seating thirty thousand spectators, was by now no longer available. Holborn Stadium, with three thousand seats only, had to be engaged. Ringside accommodation cost twenty-five guineas but could have been sold out many times over. Odds of three to one were laid on Beckett after his recent victory over M'Goorty. Little was known of Carpentier's form, for the astute M. Descamps maintained an impenetrable secrecy in the environment of his principal and himself maintained a bland reticence on the subject.

Arnold Bennett brilliantly reported the match for the *New Statesman*. Charles Cochran, he wrote, "looked rather like one of the Antonines," while Carpentier, in spite of a painfully swollen right arm, "moved like a tiger," the famous smile utterly vanished from the stern lines of a 'fighting face.' Beckett, after the first few seconds, missed with an upper-cut. Carpentier, using the most elementary of boxing tricks, a sort of 'fool's mate' of the ring, fainted with his left, then got home to his opponent's jaw, like lightning, with his right. The British champion was knocked clean off his feet and counted out. The most lavishly advertised contest in boxing history had lasted just seventy-three seconds.

Cochran set himself at once to arrange for the

winner to meet Jack Dempsey of America. He encountered stubborn competition from promoters in that country and did not come to terms with Tex Rickard until November, 1920, when final articles were signed at the Hotel Claridge in New York in the presence of a journalist who described the room as "lighted by a soft red glow given out by the roast-beef complexion of the English promoter, Charles Cochran." Other vivid-penned colleagues had preceded him in delineating the physical appearance of the Irish-Sussex impresario with the amazing record of entertainment provision and the cool nerve to back a Frenchman against an American. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* referred to his having "the shoulders of a light heavy-weight and the springy step of a highly-trained athlete in perfect condition," while his eyes were "a sort of cross in colour between brown and blue. It must be an excellent combination, for there has never been a time when he could not see a good thing."

It is, however, easier to see than to do. Nothing short of physical collapse could have stopped Cochran from accomplishing his purpose of matching Carpentier with Dempsey. It was physical collapse which did stop him. On the voyage home to England he complained of 'headaches'. Even his 'perfect condition' had not availed him against the supernatural strain he had put upon it, particularly during the last ten years. Specialists ordered

him to bed at once. He was not even to dream of business for several months.

Dempsey, as most of us know, eventually met and beat Carpentier under Rickard's management. It was the beginning of five years' bad luck for C.B.C., who faced his first big loss—five thousand pounds—when the doctors refused to allow him to read letters or see anyone at all on any question of business whatever.

He had overdone things and met his match, not in any external obstacle, human or circumstantial, but in the natural protest of his own magnificent constitution, which he had driven beyond the limits of an endurance equal to any that has ever been recorded of men of action. His feats had been terrific and the price was proportionately heavy. Omitting altogether the strenuous years with Mansfield and the dire struggle for existence that had preceded them, Charles Cochran, up to the end of 1920, had been the busiest and most successful theatrical agent in London, had started three 'crazes' in the metropolis, those for wrestling, roller-skating and pre-war boxing, had put the circus on the British map as an organised national institution, had produced in *The Miracle* an absolutely original and superbly finished work of art on the grand scale, had invented and established permanently in London the English form of the *revue intime*, had taken a leading part in the enormously exacting post-war boxing boom and had given his public

a greater variety of intellectual as well as emotional thrills, laughter and beauty than had ever been known in one place in the world before

It was enough for lasting glory. But there was much more to come. The sheer expense of energy would have killed many an equally brilliant man in the hour of his victory. Cochran was not only to survive triumphantly but positively to bring a new spirit with him, transcending the old, when he returned to the scenes of his fame in 1921.

CHAPTER IV

THE 'TWENTIES

THE doctors could prevent Charles Cochran from transacting his ordinary or rather extraordinary professional affairs. But they could not prevent him from thinking of them. He was for the moment, comprehensibly enough in all conscience, rather tired of boxing promotion. He had seen too much greed in this sphere, too many dubious manoeuvres, and for his taste overmuch sharp practice among fighters and their managers. There was, moreover, in boxing plenty of one of his favourite ingredients, 'sensation,' but not enough of another, æsthetic thrill. Nor even enough, at least among those most profitable of boxers, heavy-weights, of scientific interest, such as even conjurers and acrobats provide. As the 'great showman's,' convalescence progressed he began to dream more and more of the still more familiar world of straighter runners and more colourful and intelligent personalities.

While he was still in bed, in January, 1921, Murray Anderson produced for him at the New Oxford Theatre, which had been rebuilt under his direction the previous year at a cost of no less than

eighty thousand pounds, the *revue* with an extremely topical title, *League of Nations*, an intelligent and beautiful show which could nevertheless hardly be ranked as a commercial success. The physical absence of the guiding star himself, the comparatively small proportion of 'laughs' provided, a year of devastating strikes, an exceptionally hot summer and an accident to one of the 'Dolly Sisters' who played a conspicuous part in the 'Nations,' dimmed the lustre of box-office receipts

The still sick invalid soon afterwards went off to Spain to recuperate. He cared little for the national weakness of Spaniards for cards and betting—he was a gambler on a far more monstrous scale than any casino could attempt—but much for the Goyas in Madrid and the gipsy dances, the *flamenco* in Seville, which fairy city he was lucky enough to visit in Easter Week, the most exciting *fiesta* period of the year. In these gay and romantic surroundings he met and continually associated with two outstanding Russian personalities in the world of art, Serge Diaghileff and Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky, the revolutionary composer whose *Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *Sacré du Printemps* had long since made both himself and their producer Diaghileff famous. These friendships, matured in the congenially picturesque atmospheres of Andalusian cafés, were to have notable effects upon Cochran's subsequent career.

In Seville, too, he discovered 'the most beautiful girl in the world,' Trini Ramos, aged fifteen, the daughter of a professional 'gipsy dancer.' After protracted negotiations with a suspicious and tempestuous family, Cochran succeeded in inducing Trini to promise to come to London, with a view to a stage appearance. She was subsequently seen in *The Fun of the Fayre*, a revue with a title reminiscent of the Seville *fiesta*, in October, 1921, at the Pavilion. But here again receipts were disappointing, chiefly owing to the fact that the Fratellini Brothers, clowns of international fame engaged for the production, were hooted off the stage as 'Germans' by an audience still only half-convalescent from war-hysteria. Trini Ramos subsequently went, like so many other rarities of art and nature, to America, where she had the success her exceptional charm and beauty deserved.

Before Charles Cochran returned from Spain in the early summer, the great French actress Sarah Bernhardt, whom he had met in the United States in the Richard Mansfield days, appeared under his management at the Princes Theatre. In May, the Cæsar of entertainment was back in London, producing for Diaghileff the celebrated ballerina Lopokova in Russian ballet, with Stravinsky's music and designs by the most original genius in European painting at that date, the initiator of Cubism and still paramount influence in modern art, Pablo Picasso. Spain and Diaghileff had made a

temporary 'balletomane' of Charles Cochran. In Paris, on the way home, the Chauve Souris company had impressed him as the most brilliant entertainment even he had ever seen or dreamed of. He brought it to the Pavilion in September, confident of the most spectacular success of his whole theatrical experience. But the production barely paid its way, being stigmatised by prominent metropolitan critics as merely 'glorified cabaret.'

An incomprehensible 'rot' seemed to have set in upon the career of the most illustrious of modern impresarios. It was partly due to his being his own competitor, one or two or more simultaneous shows drawing audiences to the detriment of the rest. But mostly the series of 'magnificent failures' in these years was sheer bad luck. At Seville a sherry had been named after him by the firm of Gonzalez Byass, in compliment to his appreciation thereof. The recipient of this honour must occasionally have wondered, during the 'twenties, whether he would ever come to depend entirely upon this source of revenue.

The Man in Dress Clothes, produced by Cochran in March, 1922, provided a typical instance of adverse circumstance operating beyond his own control. This play was an adaption from the French of *L'Homme En Habit* by André Picard and Yves Mirande, and in Paris had succeeded by its comic elements. That superb comedian Sir Seymour Hicks characteristically tried to get tears instead of

laughter in the third act and so, in the producer's opinion, spoiled whatever chances the piece had of appealing to English audiences.

But the most ambitious and the most disappointing failure of all was the *revue*, *Mayfair and Montmartre*, which was presented at the New Oxford Theatre in 1922 and ran from 9th March to 20th May. In spite of the gorgeous settings inspired by Boccaccio and the daring 'brainwave' of the 'Inca Ballet' the Press damned this enterprise almost universally. There seemed to Cochran something exceedingly mysterious about these attacks. They did not all ring quite true and some of them were contradictory. The formidable journalist, Hannen Swaffer, for instance, wrote in his first notice

"By far the most splendid *revue* even Cochran has ever given us. In a Boccaccio scene, Florentine wonders had been conjured up, the Middle Ages had come to life again. Beautiful women had worn costumes of peacock-like splendour which made one live again in a southern sun, costumes of shapes so grotesque, of colours so extravagant, that the eye ached with staring." He added that "the Russian Ballet has never staged a scene so wonderful as the 'Inca Ballet.'"

Yet next day Mr. Swaffer abused the production even more heartily than he had praised it.

It appeared that the cause of these peculiar manœuvres was an item in the *revue* which held critics in general up to gentle ridicule. The scene

was the lightest possible skit. But it seems that it seriously wounded the hard-bitten gentry therein satirised or else they determined in concert that such an affront to their dignity could not be allowed to pass muster. The assumption of *lèse-majesté* was more ridiculous than the leg-pull that elicited it. Charles Cochran lost his famous good-temper at last and threatened to bar professional critics, some of whom, in his opinion at the time, 'ought to be shot,' from his theatres in future.

The effect of this forcible retort was sensational. The critics repented in public with suspicious alacrity. Their articles now resembled that which had originally been printed in the *Manchester Guardian*, where it was boldly affirmed that *Mayfair and Montmartre* "is a gigantic essay in the Grand Babylonian manner—" Arnold Bennett's novel *The Grand Babylon Hotel* had just been published—"with brilliant flashes of colour and occasional brilliant flashes of wit. The staging, the ballets, the mannequins, the tumblers, the whole mad masquerade revealed an astonishing mastery of finished flamboyance. Mr. Cochran's command of showmanship is as assured as ever."

A. B. Walkley wrote in *The Times* that it was absurd to detect lack of unity in a show the essence of which was variety or to complain that a pot-pourri for all tastes might be vulgar or puerile in parts. For in an earlier paragraph he had defined *revue* in phrases which Charles Cochran himself

could hardly have bettered. "*Revue* amuses by fun, by satire of passing events, by gorgeous spectacle which delights the child in all of us, by song and dance, by glimpses of drama, by the agility of man and the beauty of woman, above all by the rapid alternation of these elements. Its crowning virtue is variety." He added that Mr. Cochran seemed quite literally to survey mankind from China to Peru, for a Chinese dance and an Inca ceremony formed two of the 'items.'

The situation was saved for the moment, though it may perhaps be doubted whether sheer spectacle on *Folies Bergères* lines is ever so cordially appreciated in this country as it is on the Continent. High-brows are always ready to say that such 'extravagant flamboyance' is vulgar and low-brows in England will always prefer farce to beauty. In any case, this particular example was doomed for other causes. Delysia, round whose intense personality the whole production was built up, shortly collapsed with throat trouble and could not sing a note. Charles Cochran eventually lost twenty thousand pounds on this noble successor to the equally unlucky *League of Nations*.

He tried the experiment, at the same house, the reconstructed 'New Oxford,' of two shows a day and seven-and-sixpenny stalls. But *Chuckles* languished when the principal comedian, Bobby Clarke, departed to fulfil a contract in the United States. In the autumn of 1922, C.B.C., whose financial fortunes

were now seriously depleted, followed him, in something like despair, to collect in America a parcel of 'books' to restore the balance.

He came back with *Partners Again*, *So This is London*, *Little Nelly Kelly* and *The Music Box Revue*. In a side-pocket was *Anna Christie* which had won the Pulitzer Prize a few months before for the most conspicuous of the younger American dramatists, that startlingly original genius of the theatre, Eugene O'Neill. Charles Cochran hoped for much from all these 'finds.' But his main stake was the electrifying negress Florence Mills, with her all-coloured company, in *Dover Street to Dixie*. This *revue* proved, in fact, the most popular of the 1923 shows in London, though audiences were at first highly critical of a definitely sophisticated presentation in which not a single artist with a white skin appeared. But the astonishing verve and speed of the piece triumphed over race-snobbery. Once more 'Cockie,' as he now began to be affectionately called by his intimates, had given London something absolutely new and exciting to see, hear and talk about.

The other importations, too, did fairly well. And 1923 also saw a further Guitry season and some Duse matinées at the 'New Oxford.' The illustrious Italian actress was then in her sixty-fourth year and was to die in 1924. She had been living in retirement ever since 1909 for reasons of health, pecuniary losses arising out of the war of 1914-18 forced her to return

to the stage in 1921, when she conquered the world a second time as the white-haired Ellida in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*. In London in June, 1923, she played to far fuller houses, under Cochran's direction, than she had known in the heyday of her glory. After her departure it seemed that the whole theatrical world had received a new lease of life by drinking at the subtle spring of nectar and ambrosia distilled upon the stage of the 'New Oxford'

As for *Anna Christie*, this strange and deeply moving melodrama remained the talk of London playgoers, from the *cognoscenti* to the gallery girl, for months. Comment was heard on all sides upon the versatile and dexterous manager who could handle so many different kinds of dramatic art with equal enthusiasm and efficacy. Yet by the end of the year he was practically bankrupt. He had spent, if never recklessly, at least far too lavishly to be able to recoup losses due to persistent and unforeseen ill-luck. He could never be anything but princely in expenditure. So princely remuneration was the only sort that could even keep his head above water.

Actual bankruptcy was in fact in store for him in January, 1925. But before then he played for one last grand stake and lost.

The British Empire Exhibition was opened at Wembley in April, 1924. Charles Cochran, resourceful, daring and unconventional to the end, hired no fewer than one hundred and fifty American cowboys, to compete at Wembley with others from Canada,

the Argentine and Australia, in an international 'rodeo,' or series of contests and sports associated with or suggested by the ordinary cowboy's everyday routine. The idea was characteristically novel, for few English people had ever even heard of 'rodeo.' It also promised terrific thrills of the circus-riding variety but raised to the nth power by the wild speed and dangerous nature of the exploits to be attempted. The patriotic element required by the occasion was provided by the Canadian and Australian competitors. But it was an open secret that the Americans were the 'stars.'

Excitement, aroused to fever pitch by a typically Cochranian campaign of preliminary advertisement and also by some public incidents of an uproarious character which will be referred to later, reached sensational heights on the opening day of the 'rodeo.' The stands were packed. But the strangely sinister fate that had dogged Cochran ever since his physical breakdown in 1920 would not even on this grand and apparently hugely propitious occasion be denied. Nothing could have been more ruinously unfortunate than the accident by which a steer's leg was broken in the course of the first evening's performance. Cochran has written,¹ "The light was bad by the time the steer-roping events took place. The ground, also, was not properly laid, for the tan had not settled down over the cinder track which ran

¹ *I Had Almost Forgotten*, p. 66.

round the arena." Such were the infinitesimal details through which the greatest feat of public entertainment known since the days of Barnum and Bailey came to disaster.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which body had for some time previously been organising public protests against the 'rodeo,' initiated legal proceedings. The summonses, heard by a local police court, were dismissed, in spite of a characteristically heart-rending speech by Sir Henry Curtis-Bennett. The Bench may or may not have been moved to leniency by the sight of the enormous six-shooters 'packed' by the defendant cowboys, who wore their full picturesque regalia in court. Nevertheless, the damage to Cochran's pocket was done. An impression got abroad that the 'rodeo' was 'cruel,' fanatics thundered, and attendances dwindled, even at the semi-private performances which were all that the exhibition authorities would allow after this *débâcle*. What might have been the outstanding item of national 'attractions' for the whole decade diminished to a mere specialists' gathering, altogether without the glamour which a large lay audience would have conferred.

Cochran had put in six months' gruelling work in arranging the Wembley 'rodeo.' He had now nothing to show for all his trouble but a disagreeable and quite unfounded suspicion that he had countenanced 'cruelty.' He could no longer resist a fate that really was 'cruel.' On 14th October, 1924,

one of the most bountiful public benefactors of his time was adjudged bankrupt.

The 'rodeo,' like most other financial disasters, had not lacked its lighter side. The boisterous party from overseas travelled from Tilbury to Wembley in twenty motor-coaches. Most of them had never seen even a fair-sized town before, let alone the vastest capital city in the world. The progress through the streets was riotous, for the effervescent passengers in the motor-coaches whipped off the 'toppers' of elderly City 'gents' with their lariats in Cheapside and lassoed together in sudden and embarrassing intimacy perfect strangers of opposite sexes and staid demeanour who were enjoying strolls through the West End. On a later occasion, a number of these high-spirited invaders from the Wild West, after being rather generously entertained to luncheon at British Columbia House, securely roped to a certain lamp-post in the middle of Regent Street in the afternoon a pair of exceptionally substantial metropolitan police constables.

Such unrehearsed spontaneities went down a good deal better with the London populace than the scheduled performances the cowboys had really come to give. Unfortunately for Charles Cochran, the former did not have to be paid for to be witnessed.

He told his Examiners in the Bankruptcy Court, on the 29th January, 1925, that he dated his financial breakdown from the gigantic losses, amounting to no less than ninety-eight thousand

pounds, he had incurred in connection with the reconstruction and subsequent management as the New Oxford Theatre of the old Oxford Music Hall. In 1919 the cost of rebuilding this house had been estimated at twenty-five thousand pounds. But the work eventually absorbed, owing to labour troubles and an accident to the roof, £66,645. He had defrayed this expenditure by advancing a sum of £90,000 secured on a debenture of Oxford Productions, Ltd. But most of the pieces presented at the rebuilt theatre lost money. The Company could not pay its rent and surrendered its licence by default in September, 1923. Further losses were ascribed to the collapse of the Dempsey-Carpentier negotiations in 1920 and the depredations of professional moneylenders to whom the unlucky manager was compelled to resort in May, 1921, on his return from Spain.

Cochran's total liabilities were computed by the Court at £109,284, of which a sum of £96,552 remained unsecured. His assets were put at £2,466 and the total deficiency at £94,235. Practically all the creditors were in favour of a discharge being granted. No evidence, needless to say, was offered against the debtor's honesty or integrity. It was proved conclusively that he had never misled anyone to his own knowledge and that a series of hostile circumstances which he could not possibly have foreseen or controlled were responsible for his financial failure. The Registrar noted the case as

altogether exceptional and granted in April a discharge subject to a judgment of £1,000 costs.

The bankruptcy had one excellent result. It caused Cochran, in his embarrassment for money, to write a book of reminiscences (*Secrets of a Showman*, 1925) which is one of the most entertaining and instructive of its kind ever issued. It is full of good stories, personal modesty and remarkable vignettes of the many odd characters and situations encountered by the author in his amazingly chequered career. Clearly, he had not forgotten, in 1925, the journalistic skill which he had shown in the days when he was hobnobbing with the men of the 'nineties and partially earning his living by writing articles on American life for various magazines and newspapers then published in London.

Those who purchased this volume in the hope of discovering the 'secrets' referred to in the title, assuming them to be short cuts to managerial success, were disappointed. The only magic talismans in the life of a modern hero like Charles Cochran are to be found in hard work and those occasional flashes of inspiration, decidedly frequent in his case, to enjoy which one must be born, not made. The showman has fully described these 'secrets' in his book, for he has never done anything in his career that he wanted to hide. But they were never really secrets at all, even before he printed them, for Cochran is not only the very

reverse of secretive in his private character but his public profession has demanded in its own interest the greatest possible light on all his actions.

The British public now had, in *Secrets of a Showman*, a pretty full historical portrait of its 'Cockie,' and this was all to the good from the author's point of view, for it gained him an enormous amount of sympathy in his predicament and good will for his future activities. Never did a defeated giant, even one so incorrigibly optimistic as Charles Cochran, rise to reconquer his place in the sun with a confidence more justified by personal popularity.

In July, 1926, a substantial proof of this public appreciation was given him. He was appointed to succeed the late Hilton Carter as Manager of the Albert Hall, for a period of five years. He announced that he hoped to be allowed by Parliament to enlarge the somewhat restricted scope of entertainment at present permitted to adorn those hallowed precincts. A revival of *The Miracle* was one project. Another—shades of Queen Victoria and Albert the Good!—was a proposed presentation of a play by Aristophanes on the large, spectacular scale which Cochran had made peculiarly his own. He was anxious, too, to see Robert Loraine as Henry V in a really massive production of Shakespeare's play and to rival Reinhardt's *Ædipus Rex*. But Parliament moved slowly. These exciting ideas had to wait in cold storage for a time, during which they underwent considerable modification.

But, long before the year of bankruptcy itself—1924–1925—was out, Cochran was hard at work on lines which were, once more, to produce under his inspiration something quite new to London, or, indeed, any other audiences. He met at this date the young man who more than any other Englishman of his day expressed the nervous, haunted and defiant disillusionment of the middle 'twenties, the epoch when all the old ideals seemed to so many young people to have burned out, leaving nothing worth while but feverish and trivial, if often dangerous enough, distraction.

Noel Coward's first successful play, *The Vortex*, dwelt in a bitterly amused and witty fashion new to the London stage upon the odious squalors underlying the hectic gaiety of so many 'Bright Young People' and their hollow-souled parents. In 1925–6 he was to follow this up by further essays in a similar genre, *Fallen Angels*, *Hay Fever* and *Easy Virtue*, whose titles explain their plots but scarcely indicate the accuracies of the barbed satire or the dexterous sentimentalities with which that satire was judiciously seasoned. Cochran in 1925 saw in Coward a young man who was going to matter a great deal in the world of the theatre. It was Cochran's business to associate closely with people who were going to matter in his world, in that world in which he himself already mattered so incontrovertibly. Soon he and Coward were talking together very earnestly.

It seems at first a strange association between opposite types, the cheerful, confident, middle-aged man of the world, lover of exotic beauty and spectacular grandeur, with a romantic, rough-and-tumble existence behind him and so many sensational theatrical achievements to his credit, and the sardonic, despondently cynical youth from Streatham, obsessed with a narrowing, collapsing world, looking neither forward nor back, conscious of brilliant gifts but not seeing any particular point in using them, deeply aware of the futility of ambition. But there were decisive points that these two men of genius had in common. They were both showmen, men of the theatre in blood and bones, they were both great humorists and had the fundamental decency that accompanies the richer developments of this faculty. They were both prolific, rather fond of 'making a splash,' intensely active and at intervals inspired. It was enough for a collaboration. It turned out to be enough for a triumph.

The ballroom dance was the symbol of the restless glittering, artificial life of London in the mid-post-war period. The *revues* written by Noel Coward and produced by Charles Cochran in 1925 were called *On With The Dance* and *Still Dancing*. Together they mirrored what Coward had to say and how Cochran had determined he was to say it. Realism and romance, loveliness and horror, hope and despair, pity and mockery, were cunningly

mingled in these heralds of a new literary as well as theatrical mode. All London crowded to see itself through these bewildering spectacles and Charles Cochran found himself, as he had never doubted he would, pretty firmly on his feet again.

Noel Coward has called C.B.C. a sentimentalist with taste and a cynic with enthusiasm. The older man could to-day return the compliment with interest, for his influence on the younger has been wholly in the direction of developing in him the qualities so described, which would indeed fit most men of outstanding artistic ability. This happy conjunction of stars accomplished all that Cochran had all along intended it should.

Meanwhile Florence Mills and her 'black company' were repeating under the same manager in *Blackbirds*, first shown in September, 1926, the triumphs of *Dover Street to Dixie*. The negress entertainer, who had always been popular in Paris, now swept London and was soon to sweep northern Europe. Cochran played a leading part in the difficult first steps of introducing to the British stage a race with such a genius for gaiety and display. The 'white man's burden' of the old imperialistic days became, through him, at least at home, an important ingredient in the white man's pleasures.

C.B.C.'s pioneering has been a constant and conspicuous element in his activities. He is always on the look-out for something or somebody in

the world of spectacle hitherto unknown to London audiences and he is always ready to take the risk of those audiences not following the lead of foreign countries in the case of proved successes or following it only too faithfully in cases, like that of Hackenschmidt, of undeserved failure abroad.

In the summer of 1925, at his invitation, the world-famous Italian dramatist and novelist, Luigi Pirandello, brought a company of native players to the New Oxford Theatre. Complete failure was prophesied by all knowledgeable men of the British theatre. Most of Pirandello's plays, though bitterly realistic and dealing only with the modest vicissitudes of clerks, teachers, lodging-house keepers and other such humble persons, were terrifyingly metaphysical in import and the philosophy they preached was one of unrelieved despair. Moreover, the percentage of even cultured English people who understand spoken Italian is extremely small. Intellectual cerebration on the London stage and in Italian ! The wiseacres had some reason to shake their heads. But Italian vivacity made up for the incomprehensible language and the ideological themes. Those especially treated by Pirandello, the necessity and the vanity of illusion, the lying unreality of multiform appearance and the difference between what a man thinks he is and what he is to other people, were in fact grimly familiar to the mid-post-war audiences, already pretty thoroughly trained by their demobilised poets in the geography

of fools' paradises Noel Coward himself could almost be considered a Pirandellian with a lighter, more careless and fantastic touch.

Cochran did not make a fortune out of his Pirandello season. But he was by no means disappointed with the enthusiasm of those who visited the 'New Oxford' at this time. It reached sufficient proportions to prove to him that it was still worth while to keep a foot in the highbrow camp, a resort, which it is, in any case, quite certain, that he will never abandon, in spite of its congestion with such brain-snobs as the important lady who said, on seeing Signor Pirandello coming upstairs at a reception in his honour "But surely he's going to shave off that horrid beard before he *sings*!"

The post-war lawn tennis boom had languished a little after the retirement in 1924 of its most sensational exponent, Suzanne Lenglen. But this electric-limbed and electric-tempered Frenchwoman was ready to 'come back' in 1925. Cochran saw in this, for him, untouched sphere, a chance of engineering one of his favourite 'revivals'. He offered to 'manage' Suzanne. She agreed and the experienced impresario found himself involved in a new and strange world, that for which he invented the term 'shamateurism'. He had not realised how remunerative amateur lawn tennis could be made by astute players and their backers. 'Expenses,' for all practical purposes, operated in these circles as salaries. And the sums thus acquired far exceeded

what even the best professionals were paid. Suzanne Lenglen did in fact become a professional in 1926, largely owing to Cochran's own advice. He always regarded her as essentially an artist and it is typical of his catholicity in the appraisal of 'artists' that he was able to say of the lawn tennis 'star' that she resembled Eleonora Duse in her "super-sensitive fear of criticism."

In May, 1927, Cochran was called to give evidence before a committee of the House of Lords that was considering the proposed extension of the entertainment facilities to be accorded to the Albert Hall. He told the noble deliberators that he by no means intended, in his capacity as manager of that building, to give ordinary theatrical performances there. His plans were limited to the production of 'advanced' spectacles on the lines supposed to have prevailed in ancient Greece, with much poetry and very little scenery. This tactful reassurance to the official guardians of culture, who had seemed to be afraid he might turn the venerable pile into a Folies Bergères, was in true Cochranian vein. He soon had the legislators laughing by reminding them that if he wished to promote 'undesirable' performances all he had to do would be to take the said dubious entertainments 'elsewhere,' to one of his other houses. But he was characteristically frank and firm in insisting that if he were to be given a free hand the Royal Choral

Society, which body was inclined to regard the Albert Hall as something like their spiritual home, would, too, have to go 'elsewhere.'

Of Cochran's subsequent productions at the Albert Hall perhaps the appearance of the famous Russian bass, Chaliapine, in October, 1927, marks the most notable success. This superbly-equipped veteran operatic singer was paid twelve hundred and fifty pounds, the biggest fee ever allotted anywhere to any artist, for each of the two evening recitals that he gave and prices were proportionately enormous. He was supported by the London Symphony Orchestra under Albert Coates. On the first night Chaliapine sang the part of Varlaam, the rascally monk, in the inn scene from *Boris Godounov*, and on the second that of Salieri in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri*, an operatic setting of Pushkin's duologue of that name. The costs of this affair made substantial profit out of the question. But, as so often before and since, Charles Cochran was content to have provided London with a grand artistic occasion, for in spite of the notorious Albert Hall 'echo' the power and splendour of the great voice had never been in better evidence. He had the satisfaction of being told by the delighted Chaliapine that he was a 'wonderful man' and of being called 'Chaliocran' for a few weeks by his friends and in the Press. It was a period, as festive hours so often are, of the

tree bestowal of nicknames. Lady Diana Duff Cooper's for the magnificent Muscovite was 'Charlie Pine.'

The 'other Charlie' had already, this year, turned back to his old love, boxing. On the 30th June, 1927, at Olympia, the two Roman Catholic boxers, Mickey Walker, of America, and Tommy Milligan, the Scottish miner, met under Cochran's auspices to decide the middle-weight championship of the world. The former's share of the purse was £22,000. Milligan received a mere beggarly three thousand, a sum, however, which would have made champion boxers of the pre-war era almost too groggy to go into the ring. Both men crossed themselves, a somewhat unusual precaution among practitioners of the noble art, before the gong sounded. Milligan's seconds threw in their towel in the tenth round, after their man had taken five 'counts' since the sixth. This timely gesture probably coincided with the referee's final 'out'. The fight was a good one, Milligan at first leading on points. But he did not possess, as it turned out, that *sine qua non* of the successful boxer, 'a punch.' Yet Cochran's first post-Dempsey-Carpentier effort in this direction was even more unlucky than the American venture itself. On the very day of the match that extremely influential but not very agreeable figure in contemporary sporting and theatrical society, 'Jimmy' White, saved the State a good deal of trouble and expense by committing

suicide. The result of this final spectacular act in a career of almost unexampled gamblers' recklessness—White had lost £250,000 in oil speculation that day—was, so far as Charles Cochran was concerned, a ruinous proportion of empty seats at the Olympia ringside. The wealthy followers of boxing had, most of them, more urgent business that evening.

Cochran lost fifteen thousand pounds on his particular 'deal' in Walker-Milligan stock. He was not consoled by perusing, a little later on, in common with all the rest of England, the famous valedictory letter in which 'Jimmy' expressed his sentimental remorse for a misspent life.

If boxing promotion was again proving more than disappointing the old field of *revue* made up for it. The prolific association between Charles Cochran and Noel Coward was by no means at an end. Indeed, it could be said in 1927 to be only just beginning. For the next two years Cochran looked with thoroughly justified confidence to this successful partnership for his chief activities.

He had therefore good reason, in January, 1928, for telling the Repertory Players at their annual dinner at the Park Lane Hotel that the 'Americanism' of the British stage would not last much longer. But the reason he actually advanced on that occasion was a characteristically modest and humorous one. There were only two plays left in America, he said, that had not yet been produced

in England and these two had both been banned by the Lord Chamberlain

In March the famous Coward-Cochran *revue*, *This Year of Grace*, was presented at the Pavilion, whose audience Charles Cochran has complimented—before this house was given over to films, of course—by calling it the most sophisticated and critical in the world

Nothing could have been more up to the minute than *This Year of Grace*, whose very title emphasised its modernity. By a natural reaction the next piece by Coward, *Bitter Sweet*, went back to the eighteen-nineties for its setting.

The year 1929 was notable for yet another 'intellectual' gesture by the versatile showman. Sean O'Casey, a plasterer from the waterside tenements of Dublin, had first made his reputation with *Juno and the Paycock*, produced at the Royalty Theatre in London in 1925. His *The Plough and the Stars* had confirmed his standing, in 1926, as a consummate realist and the possessor of a rich fund of pity and humour that transcended his squalid themes. This latter play won him the Hawthornden Prize from English literary opinion. But *The Silver Tassie* was rejected by the Abbey Theatre of Dublin, which had sponsored, though with some reluctance in the case of *The Plough and The Stars*, his earlier dramas. The previous reluctance had been largely due to political and national causes. O'Casey's merciless showing up

of the slum 'patriots' had not been popular. But in *The Silver Tassie* it was the symbolism that frightened the conservatives. Characters spoke their thoughts aloud and there was a very strange Second Act. This originality was just what Cochran was looking for to revitalise a serious drama that was showing ominous signs of exhaustion in sterile foreign importations and dull native 'problem-plays' that interested no one.

Raymond Massey produced *The Silver Tassie* for Cochran and Augustus John painted some extraordinary scenery for that impressive nightmare of a Second Act. The piece fluttered dovecotes from Bloomsbury to Fulham. An acrimonious newspaper and vocal controversy broke out. Should Charles Cochran be canonised forthwith as the man who saved British drama when it was on the point of extinction, or should he, on the contrary, be burnt at the stake for abominable dramatic heresy?

The delighted showman did not care which conclusion was reached. He had done what he best loved doing, to wit, rousing the artistic conscience of the nation, and he was satisfied to leave it at that. One of the most admirable features in his character is that he never goes beyond his brief as a manager. Most impresarios with anything like such a record of successes behind them in every field of dramatic presentation would have long ago set up in spiritual business as dictators of æsthetic dogma. Cochran, beyond saying that

he considers any good artist the equal of any other good artist in no matter what sphere, has never pronounced on the philosophy of beauty. His job, he seems to say, is to show her, not to explain her. And to show her continuously, in one after another of her infinite variety of guises, preferably those unknown or unfamiliar to Londoners. He is a tireless hunter of novelties. But the novelties must in every case pass the strict barrier of his taste and intuitive judgment of quality.

The 'twenties, which had begun so disastrously for him, ended in a fresh burst of splendour. An immense improvement in the vitality and significance of the *genre* of the *revue*, with the co-operation of a man of genius after his own heart, was paralleled by a sturdy and effective championship of those intellectual values in the theatre which so many willing *revue* patrons fail to recognise. By 1930 Cochran was his old self and more, ready for all-comers and all propositions fit to serve beneath his eminently progressive but sternly fastidious standard.

CHAPTER V

THE 'THIRTIES

HE began by publishing, in February, a charming book conceived in a spirit characteristically combined of exuberant optimism and incisive mental challenge. He had asked half a dozen eminent dramatic critics and a number of equally eminent producers, actors and artists to answer the question What would you do with the theatre in England if you had a free hand and a full purse ? The replies, as might be expected from the following list of contributors to the *Review of Revues*, as the volume was called, varied widely in purport if not in merit. Charles Morgan, St John Ervine, James Agate, Ivor Brown and W J Turner spoke up for the critics, Ashley Dukes, Constance Collier, Sidney Dark, Komisarjevsky, Sir William Nicholson, Oliver Messel and Fougasse also made their reactions to this engrossing idea remarkably and eloquently clear. Cochran did not adopt any one of their suggestions in its sumptuous entirety But he learned a good deal from this artfully framed enquiry and embodied much of his learning in the productions that were to make theatrical history in the nineteen-thirties.

Evergreen, produced at the 'Adelphi' on 4th December, 1930, elicited from *The Times* the comment that "Mr Cochran is his own most formidable rival, for his *revues* at the Pavilion have been consistently the best in London and the entertainment in *Evergreen* is as good as ever" Jessie Matthews in this 'musical show' played a part symbolic enough of the producer's own career. She was presented as a rejuvenated old lady, a star at the Casino des Folies, with a middle-aged daughter. The case was the Horatian one, as with C.B. himself and his spiritual sons, of *filia pulchra, mater pulchrior*. The circus and fair scenes and the Spanish dances revealed the authentic sign manual of the versatile manager. Ernst Stern and Rex Whistler designed. If any fault could be found with *Evergreen* it was that the humorous and satirical elements so important in *revue* were given less than their usual prominence.

Apart from plays, the most remarkable achievement of Charles Cochran in 1930 was the introduction to English audiences of the superb Spanish dancer La Argentina, whose reputation at this date was international. According to the discerning French critic André Levinson she could be said to express so purely the native genius of her soil as to have "reconquered Andalusia from the Arabs" far more effectively than Ferdinand and Isabella. For La Argentina was not a gipsy dancer, of the type so often seen by Cochran in Seville in

1921. Her art was much more noble and subtle than theirs, if no less passionate. The distinction was probably not very clearly perceived by Londoners in general. But La Argentina fully justified her manager's confidence that she would astonish and delight a far larger majority than the connoisseurs. He gave a reception for her at Dorchester House in 1931, when his wife acted as hostess. It was attended by almost every socially prominent person in London with any pretensions at all to a respectable culture, to say nothing of foreign ministers and ambassadors.

In the autumn of 1930, an alliance even more important for the British theatre than that in which Noel Coward was associated seemed to be in sight. Charles Cochran offered to finance Gordon Craig, the stage-designer and writer on the art of the theatre, in the management of the Phoenix Theatre after Christmas. Craig had been living in Florence ever since 1913, elaborating his anti-naturalistic theories of scenery in a more congenial atmosphere than that of London. He now began some informal conversations with Cochran, who received his suggestions with enthusiasm. Craig spoke of the possibilities of Purcell's opera *The Fairy Queen*, with a libretto from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, of Edith Evans as Lady Macbeth, of Strindberg's *The Father*, with Robert Loraine in the chief part and of getting Max Beerbohm and John Masefield to write plays.

The Times was moved to publish a leading article on the proposed co-operation between "an artist rich in practical experience who has built up in thoughtful retirement and experiment a dramatic æsthetic of his own" and an "astute and imaginative man of business who does not hamper artists with petty restrictions." The article went on to preach a much-needed sermon on the "strident nonsense, freakish design and hack playwrights" of the present "bright" British theatre, where "mechanised triviality, crude emotion and formularised ideas" produced audiences "incapable of sustained attention, impatient of restraint and dead to the subtleties of language and feeling," though there was no reason to suppose they would remain so if they were given something better than "a form of hysteria for an almost professional 'ring' of playgoers." *The Times* hoped that Mr Craig and Mr. Cochran between them would "renew the lost contacts between the stage and a people neither frivolous nor debased and bring back the vast host of the disappointed public" to contemporary drama.

Alas! It has not been Cochran's fault that the words and import of this article could be reprinted to-day with scarcely a word of alteration. The projected union of these two brilliant men fell through because, as that monument of discretion, *The Times*, put it in another context the following year: "English managers have not been able to

find a way to enter into satisfactory partnership with " Mr Craig

1931 brought some consolation to Charles Cochran for this great lost opportunity. It was a year of financial crisis and political unrest Coward saw what was wanted by the public and supplied it in his great patriotic show *Cavalcade*, which presented the English history of the last three decades, from Mafeking night to the Currency Crisis, through the eyes of a typical feminine representative of the upper-middle class.

Those eyes were perhaps rather a small chink through which to view a great pageant. The lady did not seem quite big enough for her background. But there was no doubt of the poignancy and even thoughtfulness of the presentation For once dramatic quality, as distinguished from mere 'theatre,' came over hot and strong in a Noel Coward play, as when the tragic heroine, who had received on Armistice Night the fatal telegram announcing her only son's death in battle, went out with the rest of the population into Trafalgar Square and flourished her rattle "half-despairingly, half-defiantly." Drama told, too, in the brilliant picture of the fierce gaiety and cruel carelessness of the 'twenties, ending in crisis and confusion *Cavalcade* had lessons for the reflective as well as for the Jingo patriot

The phenomenal success of *Cavalcade* restored the typical Cochranian optimism to its full virility.

In July, he wrote to *The Times* in connection with some recent public correspondence to say that in his opinion talk of the 'dying theatre' was all bunkum. The stage had completely recovered, he implied, from the fright given to it by the invention of the talking film. But managers, he added, must realise their responsibilities. They must no longer say. "I think this play is good but it's over the heads of the public." They must say "It is a bit over *my* head, but the general public will like it." Cochran proclaimed stoutly in a further paragraph that "the manager who thinks he is catering for a lot of morons is lost," and ended by strongly recommending the Sunday opening of theatres to all who wished to do what they could to help a thoroughly healthy but indubitably struggling side of national life and culture.

The following theatrical year was signalised for Charles Cochran by three great events. The first was the production at the Adelphi Theatre of *Helen*, an English version by A. P. Herbert of the burlesque light opera, *La Belle Hélène*, by Meilhac and Halévy, with music by Offenbach, which Reinhardt had long since produced in Munich and elsewhere on the Continent. Homer's story was treated in this fantasia with a brilliantly light and capricious touch, which set a fashion for 'bringing the classics up to date'. George Robey played Menelaus with devastating effect. Oliver Messel first made his present reputation by exquisitely designing the

settings Massine directed the 'dance-orgy' that followed the 'peace conference.'

Preliminary bookings were 'record' As early as the 1st February C B C announced that 'deals' amounting in all to about one hundred thousand pounds had been completed with various theatrical booking agencies and libraries Yet this production, for which Cochran has retained a lasting affection, did not live up to his expectations of success. It seemed to fall between two stools For while the high-brows were attracted by the great name of Homer most of them probably considered that he had been disrespectfully 'jazzed.' And while the low-brows enjoyed the fooling it is likely that they did not see why on earth it should have been given a classical setting We appreciate this sort of thing better nowadays, having seen several more successful attempts at it Theoretically Cochran was perfectly right Civilised fun can quite readily be got out of a light treatment of an heroic story. Many great poets of the past, including Homer himself in his burlesque epic about the war between frogs and cranes, have gained reputations in this way.

In any case Charles Cochran found himself disappointed with the receipts from *Helen* and was inclined to blame slackness in the cast for the play's comparative failure He refused to agree with Lord Winterton that a light entertainment of this type could not act 'culturally' upon an audience In his opinion the names of Homer,

Reinhardt and Offenbach were guarantees of Helen's cultural value. He added, in a letter to *The Times* in June advocating the Sunday opening of cinemas, institutions that present for the most part somewhat frivolous entertainment, "Since I first read a good translation of Aristophanes I have never been able to share . . . the (British) suspicion of entertainments that are not a tragedy or a tract."

A good example, by the way, of Cochran's skill with his pen, dating back to the old Yellow Book days, as well as of his thoroughgoing democratic sentiments and his equable fairmindedness, is to be found in an earlier paragraph of this same letter. He writes of the controversy about Sunday cinemas as being due to "the old division between those who regard themselves as of like kind with their fellow-citizens and those who actually and quite conscientiously believe that they have a duty to compel the ordinary ruck of humanity into doing for their own good what their self-appointed mentors happen instinctively to prefer"

A second great occasion and great disappointment was the revival of *The Miracle* at the Lyceum Theatre in April, 1932. In every respect this production was an improvement on its predecessor of 1911. The theory and practice of production and design had made much progress, largely due to Cochran himself, since those days. Oliver Messel designed costumes of extraordinary splendour, as he had for *Helen*.

Massine played the Spielmann with masterly choreographic realism. Reinhardt came over from the Continent to produce in his latest, highly stylised manner. The cathedral framework used at Olympia was retained with certain improvements. Lady Diana Duff Cooper repeated her New York triumph as the Madonna. Tilly Losch played a rather too fiery Nun, Maud Allan the Abbess. The interior of the theatre was covered with fibrous plaster to make it look—quite successfully—like a cathedral. The Press accorded this grand effort a magnificent reception and private praise was almost universal. Yet on the third night the theatre was only half-full. It became necessary to ‘boost’ and ‘this enterprise was very thoroughly undertaken by the most illustrious professor of that science, Charles Cochran himself, assisted by various other experts.

But ten days later a second ‘slump’ set in. The old charges of fostering Roman Catholic propaganda and perpetrating actual blasphemy were repeated. The much discussed ‘spiritual values’ seemed to misfire. According to *The Times*, the play was “full of ingenious, decorative substitutes for truth, always excepting the glowing stillness, the superb passivity, of Lady Diana’s Madonna.” *The Miracle* played to only fair ‘business’ for the rest of its run, which concluded on the 23rd July, after a period of something over three months.

In August Cochran produced a new Coward *revue*, *Words and Music*, at Manchester. This piece broke completely with his tradition of scenic glories and an all-star cast. Coward wrote the 'book,' composed the score and himself acted. There were twenty items and a revolving stage was used. The public reception of this unusual production was rapturous cheers resounding even before the end of the opening chorus, so brilliantly decorative in effect were the black-and-white clothed acrobats, and their monstrous shadows, of this first 'item.' The satire and the music were considered Coward's best to date. And, as in *Cavalcade* there were serious implications behind the comic mask, *e g*, in the recurrent episodes of the three sad young *débutantes*.

Autumn publications this year included *I had Almost Forgotten*, a further book of memoirs by Cochran, with the sub-title, "Random Revelations." *Secrets of a Showman* had sold well and the author was encouraged to complete the picture of his career to date. The brilliant wit A. P. Herbert of *Punch*, *The Beggars' Opera* and House of Commons fame wrote a substantial preface in which he volunteered the not untenable opinion that "the production of a big musical play is the most difficult and complex form of corporate effort yet attempted by the human race."

For the next six years the principal theatrical events in which Charles Cochran was concerned

were two celebrated public disputes and his management of the great little German-Jewish actress Elizabeth Bergner

In March, 1932, the American Fox Films Company had acquired for the 'record' sum of twenty thousand pounds the moving picture rights of *Cavalcade*. From the moment that the completed film was shown in London the original stage play began to languish. In the end it was 'killed stone dead' by the film version. The *contretemps* led to legislative action designed to protect popular stage plays, in the future, from the overwhelming competition of the screen progeny to which they inevitably give birth sooner or later

While the *Cavalcade* case was still under discussion Cochran became involved in what looked for some time like a far more serious dispute. While he was in New York at the end of 1934, the British Actors Equity Association was formed and approved, in consultation with West End theatre managers, a certain standard form of contract between manager and actor which provided among other stipulations for full payment of salaries during rehearsals. Cochran, when he came next year to supervise the preparations for the presentation of *Mesmer*, a *revue* by Beverley Nichols, refused to recognise the new form of contract. He declared that his cast must choose between him and 'Equity,' contending that his own form of contract must prove in the end more advantageous to the actor.

He added that he would retire from production altogether if no agreement could be reached

Mr. Godfrey Tearle, the popular actor who performed the duties of President of 'Equity,' called, with his official secretary, upon Charles Cochran, found after discussion that the latter's proposals were in no way less favourable to a cast than those of 'Equity' and finally recommended his members to accept the form of contract they had previously felt bound to reject. The whole dispute had arisen on a misunderstanding. There was no need, after all, to adopt Mr. A. P. Herbert's facetious suggestion that the best way out of the difficulty would be to except C.B.C. from the arrangements approved by the other theatre managers as a conscientious objector

Cochran had first become interested in Elizabeth Bergner while she was playing the name part in the British film *Catherine The Great*, the showing of which in Berlin was forbidden in March, 1934, owing to the Jewish antecedents of the principal actress. In April of this year, while she was playing in the stage version entitled *Escape Me Never*, of Margaret Kennedy's best seller *The Constant Nymph*, under Cochran's management she fainted on the stage. All the performances of the play were at once abandoned, for the actress—who was subsequently stated to have been suffering from 'fish poisoning'—could, according to *The Times* "express with her shoulder-blades as much as most actresses

can with face, body and voice combined." She returned to her part on 7th May

Next year Cochran sent her to New York with the same play and it was while he was personally superintending the American production that the West End managers called on the Ministry of Labour in order to lay before the Government their 'standard contract,' a document afterwards repudiated by C B C, their most brilliant colleague

His plans for 1936 were comprehensive. Six productions were to be staged in twelve months, including *Mesmer*, *Dalliance*, the English version of Schnitzler's *Liebelein*, the Wodehouse revue *Anything Goes*, the 'Coronation' show, *Jubilee*, and last but far from least, Sir James Barrie's new play on a Scriptural subject, *The Boy David*, written specially for Elizabeth Bergner

The Boy David had to be postponed from 15th February to 14th March, in order to allow the actress to finish her 'Rosalind' in a film version, of *As You Like It*. But on 3rd March she collapsed after a rehearsal and it was found necessary to operate for appendicitis. She was out of danger by 18th March. But her illness had been serious and she was forbidden by the doctors to resume work before the autumn. It was not until 22nd November that *The Boy David*, with Bergner in the title rôle, and Komisarjevsky to direct, was finally produced at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh

Barrie's piece possessed all the characteristic

Barrie virtues It was beautiful, whimsically charming and highly original in conception Elizabeth Bergner is the very reverse of a Juno and hence David could not be represented as the 'valiant man of war' indicated in the Biblical text. Barrie gave his play spiritual point by arguing that the feats attributed to his hero were due to heavenly inspiration rather than physical prowess It was this supernatural guidance that both David and Saul, in the drama, denied through overweening personal pride But the conflict in the mind of the romantic child that David was made to appear could not bear comparison with the mature and kingly Saul's distraction between worldly ambition and the voice of God, between his natural love for David and his hatred of an upstart supplanter. Godfrey Tearle as Saul, 'ran away' with the play and no one could believe in Elizabeth Bergner's David, for all the virtuosity and appealing charm of her acting

Reception in Edinburgh was, however, good enough to warrant the bringing of the production to London and bringing it, too, with a certain flourish of trumpets. A warning note addressed to certain hardened first-nighters sounded amid these fanfares. On the evening of 14th December, the date fixed for the presentation at His Majesty's Theatre, no one was to be allowed, Charles Cochran announced, to enter the auditorium after the play had begun until the end of the first act. More-

over, those not in their seats when the curtain went up after an interval would have to wait for them till the act ended. No one to whom playgoing meant more than 'something to do after dinner' quarrelled with these admonitions.

The audience was brilliant and well disposed. But the criticisms heard at Edinburgh were repeated. No one who had the vaguest idea of the Bible story could believe in so Ariel-like a David. Bergner's first entrance, when she announced in a charming German accent that she had just killed a lion and a bear, set the house metaphorically shaking its head. This visionary, sexless child, by turns coltish and winsome, was just what Barrie intended the character to be. But such a David was inevitably less effective dramatically than the passionate, vigorous male of the original Old Testament version. Nor did the structurally loose last act, with its series of David's prophetic dreams of future events in his life, avail to counteract this initial error. The prophetic scenes were reduced by it to mere tableaux. This play had throughout its length many distinguished beauties. But on the whole and essentially it was voted a failure.

The Boy David was withdrawn on 30th January, 1937. After the first few performances, for which all seats were sold out in advance, receipts declined progressively, the actual takings on each day being less than those on the corresponding day of the previous week. Prices were

certainly high, stalls costing sixteen shillings and the dress circle seats, thirteen and sixpence. But this was an old dodge of Cochran's which had often succeeded in the past. The real trouble lay deeper, in the author's conception of his hero, and most people for this reason only found it difficult to agree with Harley Granville Barker in his estimate of *The Boy David* as Barrie's finest effort for the stage.

With this characteristically splendid failure, the latest major event in Charles Cochran's public career to date, this brief and necessarily somewhat arbitrary portrait of the man and his work may well conclude. It remains only to summarise what has been said and implied in the foregoing account into one final focus.

Charles Cochran has failed commercially in a larger number of enterprises, perhaps, than any other man of action and business who is in any way his equal. It is very much more difficult to estimate the number of his artistic failures. What is and what is not art will always be a matter for acrimonious dispute even among professional æsthetes. Cochran himself says that there is no such thing as good or bad art, but only good or bad artists. This question, in a popular handbook, is best left to the philosophers to determine.

His successes are a different matter. He has benefited the whole art and science of entertainment, since the beginning of this century,

to an extent almost incalculable. He has introduced to this country almost innumerable artists of unique type, from Houdini and Grock to Guitry and Bergner. he has 'managed' such supreme masters and mistresses of the international stage as Bernhardt, Duse, Chaliapine and Pirandello. he has created composite original and permanent glories of the English stage such as *The Miracle*: he has revived and infinitely enhanced the wonders of the circus as a national institution and such sports as boxing, wrestling and roller-skating: he gave London a new and gigantic thrill in the Wembley rodeo he invented and popularised, apparently for ever, the English *revue intime*, stabilised with the brilliant aid of Noel Coward and there are a hundred other features of 'London By Night,' such as 'cabaret,' which owe their inauguration and sound establishment to his inspiration

These successes have often been simultaneous. At one time he had seven plays running at the same moment in London. He has turned, almost from hour to hour, from the lightest of light items to the most serious intellectual drama, from sport to ballet, from austere beauty to the 'belly-laugh.' He has mingled continuously, with the kaleidoscopic speed of an almost supernatural energy and precise discrimination, business and pleasure, the calculation of financial profit and the zest and devotion of the pure worshipper at the shrine of art.

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